

**BEFORE THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

IN THE MATTER OF

Petition of Freeport-McMoRan, Inc. for Amendment to Exemption No. 11593

Docket Number: FAA-2015-0477

COMMENTS OF THE SMALL UAV COALITION

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February 9, 2016

Filed with www.regulations.gov

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The Small UAV Coalition¹ is pleased to provide its comments in support of the petition submitted by Pillsbury LLP on behalf of Freeport-McMoRan, Inc. (“Freeport”) for an amendment to Exemption No. 11593 to permit Freeport to operate the Prioria Robotics, Inc. Maveric small unmanned aircraft system (“sUAS”) to provide survey and inspection of mining sites as close as 50 feet horizontally to such persons, without barriers or structures to protect them.

Members of the Small UAV Coalition share an interest in advancing regulatory and policy changes that will permit the operation of small UAVs in the near term, within and beyond the line of sight, with varying degrees of autonomy, for commercial, consumer, recreational and philanthropic purposes. We applaud the Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”) for accelerating the pace of exemptions. The Coalition believes there are additional steps the FAA can take to broaden the authority to conduct commercial operations. In particular, the FAA has the authority and the discretion to permit small UAS operations within 500 feet of persons not involved in the UAS operation under the circumstances proposed in this petition for amendment, and should therefore grant this petition to revise standard condition 26 as requested.

The FAA recently granted exemption authority to conduct operations closer than 500 feet from persons not involved in the UAS operation. See Exemption No. 13465 (undated) to Kansas State University, Docket No. FAA-2014-1088. The FAA stated, at page 10, that a UAV may be operated “over or near people who are not essential flight personnel but are essential for the

¹ Members of the Small UAV Coalition include 3D Robotics, AirMap, AGI, Amazon Prime Air, Botlink, DJI Innovations, Drone Deploy, Flirtey, Google[x] Project Wing, GoPro, Intel, Kesyry, Parrot, PrecisionHawk, Strat-Aero, Verizon Ventures, and Zero Tech.

intended purpose of the operation]” We assume the persons who will be closer to Freeport’s sUAS operations will be part of its mining services and will be on notice of the sUAS operations and thus should be regarded as “essential for the intended purpose of the operation.”

The facts supporting Freeport’s petition are strong: its sUAS operations, light weight and operating at an air speed under 41 knots, will be confined to access-controlled property in remote areas with very low population density. Freeport also has undertaken a Risk Assessment, which includes undescribed safety features and PIC training requirements, and provided this document to the FAA confidentially.

The three conditions the FAA lists in Exemption No. 13465 for operations closer than 500 feet from these participants are: (1) the operator must brief the participants and obtain their consent; (2) the operator must have an operations manual that addresses the safety risks posed by such operations; and (3) the operator must file a plan of activities with the local Flight Standards District Office at least 24 hours before initiating operations. We assume Freeport’s Risk Assessment meets these conditions and is more than adequate to ensure the safety of Freeport’s proposed operations as close as 50 feet to persons who are not part of the sUAS operation.

Accordingly, the Small UAV Coalition strongly supports Freeport’s petition and recommends that it be granted.



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