



Chapter 736 Newsletter for December 2015



Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays

Message from Mike Watson

It's time to submit our Chapter Renewal for 2016. Since the deadline is 1/31/16, and we don't have a meeting scheduled before then, I will list the current officers as our 2016 officers, unless anyone opposes. If anyone has a burning desire to be President or hold another office, please let me know.

Thanks and Merry Christmas,

Mike

Full Senate passes medical reform

The full Senate has passed the Pilot's Bill of Rights 2, which will now go to the House for consideration. The Senate passed the bill, which includes third class medical reform, by unanimous consent on Dec. 15, less than a week after it was reported out by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. The House must also pass the bill before it can go to the president for a signature.

Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) introduced the Pilot's Bill of Rights 2 in the Senate in February as a follow up to the original Pilot's Bill of Rights measure he championed that became law in 2012. In addition to medical

reform, the Pilot's Bill of Rights 2 includes a number of protections for pilots facing FAA enforcement actions.

Under the medical reforms of the Pilot's Bill of Rights 2, most pilots who have held a valid third class medical, either regular or special issuance, within 10 years of the legislation's enactment would never need to get another FAA medical exam. The rule would apply to pilots flying VFR or IFR in aircraft weighing up to 6,000 pounds and carrying up to five passengers at altitudes below 18,000 feet and speeds up to 250 knots.

Pilots who develop certain medical conditions, including a small list of specific cardiac, mental health, or neurological conditions, will have to get an FAA special issuance medical one time only, significantly reducing the time and money spent navigating the FAA's medical bureaucracy.

For pilots who have not had a valid medical in the past 10 years and those who have never applied for and received a medical certificate, a one-time third class medical certification by an aviation medical examiner will be required. After a pilot has been medically certified once, either through the regular or special-issuance process, he or she will also be able to fly indefinitely without needing to go through the FAA medical certification process again.

After pilots have met these requirements, they will need to visit their personal physician once every four years for a medical exam. Pilots will need to fill out a form and provide it to the doctor performing the exam. The pilot must make a note of the visit and keep the signed form in his or her logbook.

The form will include a short medical history questionnaire as well as a list of items the doctor must include in the examination. Following the exam, both the physician and the pilot must sign the form verifying that the items were examined and discussed.

During deliberations prior to passage of the bill by the full Senate, language was added requiring the physician to certify that he or she is not aware of any medical condition that, as it is currently being treated, would interfere with the ability to fly safely.

AOPA and the Experimental Aircraft Association are committed to working with doctors and medical organizations to ensure that physicians understand the intent of the form and are comfortable with the requirements so they can keep their patients well and flying.

The process of bringing the bill this far has been one of compromise and negotiation.

"This is a big milestone, and our members deserve credit," said Jim Coon, AOPA senior vice president of government affairs. "In a climate where only about 3 percent of all bills introduced in Congress actually become law, this is a significant step forward. And while the legislation is not everything we might wish for, it will make a big difference for many, many pilots."

Unlike today's third class medical, the new exam and form will not require the doctor to make a "pass/fail" judgment, and no information about the exam needs to be provided to the FAA unless it is specifically requested. The FAA can request additional information from a pilot if it receives credible or urgent information, including information from the National Driver Register or the FAA Safety Hotline, that the pilot may not be able to safely operate an aircraft.

In addition to the medical exam by a personal physician once every four years, pilots will be required to take a free online education course on aeromedical factors every two years. The course will be designed to increase awareness and understanding of medical factors that can affect a pilot's fitness to fly.

Under the bill, the FAA will have a year from the date the legislation becomes law to produce a final rule reflecting the legislation's provisions. If the final rule is not ready within one year of the bill's enactment, pilots will be allowed to fly under the guidelines set out in the legislation without facing FAA enforcement action. The legislation also directs the FAA to streamline the special issuance medical process and identify additional medical conditions that AMEs can issue medical certificates for without requiring the pilot to go through the special issuance medical process.

FAA announces drone registration rules

The owners of recreational drones weighing between 250 grams and 55 pounds will have to register their aircraft with the FAA before making their first outdoor flight under new rules announced Dec. 14.

In a news conference announcing the rules, Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx and FAA Deputy Administrator Michael Whitaker emphasized that the safe integration of unmanned aircraft and other emerging technologies into the national transportation system is a top priority and that the registration requirement is intended to have both enforcement and educational components.

In explaining the rationale for registration, Whitaker pointed out that until recently the only people with access to the airspace system were highly trained pilots. The increase in the number of drones now flying means there are thousands of new airspace users with little or no aviation experience. The emphasis, he said, is on compliance not punishment.

Under the interim final rule, which was set to be published in the Federal Register Dec. 15, drone owners who purchase their aircraft before Dec. 21 will have until Feb. 19, 2016, to register those aircraft. Those who purchase drones after Dec. 21 will be required to register their aircraft before making their first outdoor flight.

Citing a statutory requirement that the FAA charge for registration in a way that will offset the cost of the registry, the agency set a \$5 drone registration fee—the same fee for any aircraft, manned or unmanned. But to encourage prompt registration of existing drones, that fee will be refunded for owners who register their aircraft within 30 days of Dec. 21, the date the online registration system is set to become operational. In addition, recreational drone owners can register an unlimited number of aircraft under a single registration number, meaning they need to pay only once regardless of the number of aircraft they own.

To register a drone, owners will need to visit a website, provide their name, physical address, and email address. They will also need to provide a credit card for the \$5 registration fee. Children must be at least 13 years old to register a drone; younger children will need an adult to register on their behalf. Registration will be valid for three years and owners will have the capability to deregister aircraft that are sold or taken out of service. Because the website is still in beta testing, the FAA has not yet released the URL, but has said it will do so no later than Dec. 21. Owners will also be able to access the registration website through www.FAA.gov.

Once registered, owners will receive a registration number and certificate. The registration number will have to be displayed on the aircraft and the certificate can be printed out or displayed on an electronic device as proof of registration.

To educate drone pilots about the registration requirements and the rules governing their operations, the FAA said it is working with manufacturers to include information in product packaging, using social media, and running public service announcements on scoreboards during some NFL games. The agency said it is committed to additional outreach efforts to educate the public.

Under current regulations small recreational drone operators must fly below 400 feet, keep their aircraft in sight, and avoid flying over groups of people, stadiums, or sporting events. Pilots who want to operate within five miles of an airport must contact the airport or control tower in advance.

The announcement of the registration rules comes just three weeks after a task force that included AOPA provided formal recommendations on what the rules should cover. The task force focused on producing recommendations that would encourage compliance by making registration easy and inexpensive while including an educational component to help drone owners understand the rules affecting their operations.

Commercial drone operators are already required to register their aircraft using the same paper form used to register manned aircraft. The FAA has said it will make the online registration system available to commercial drone operators in the coming months.