New app to help drone pilots comply with UK rules

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The problem of drones being flown near airports has become increasingly serious in recent years, but it's one that a new app from the air traffic control provider NATS is hoping to solve.

There has been a significant increase in reports of near misses between drones and commercial aircraft in the UK during the past year, causing disruption to air traffic and risking a major incident.

Drone Assist, powered by Altitude Angel and available for free on Android and iOS from Saturday 3 December, presents drone pilots with an interactive map of areas of airspace used by commercial air traffic. Drone operators planning to fly near these areas - usually around airports and airfields - should ideally avoid them or exercise great caution. It will also contain a 'Fly Now' feature that will share the user's drone flight location with other app users, and the wider drone community, helping to reduce the risk of a drone related incident in the UK's airspace.

Drones should always be kept well away from aircraft, airports and airfields.

The app has been developed in partnership with Altitude Angel, a leading UK-based company working on innovative future drone traffic management solutions, and also includes the location of ground based hazards that might pose a safety or privacy risk, such as power lines, schools or sports venues.

Phil Binks, NATS drone lead, said: "With the number of drone incidents on the rise, it's clear that many people are unaware of the rules or their legal obligations as pilots. Drone Assist is designed to help everyone abide by the rules, identify areas of controlled and restricted airspace and help them enjoy flying whilst ensuring their safety and the safety of other airspace users.

"We're delighted to have partnered with Altitude Angel to develop a tool that we hope will help improve drone safety in the UK and lead the way in international best practice."

The UK Airprox Board, which investigates reports of aircraft near misses, has so far reported on approximately 50 drone incidents this year up from 11 during 2015. With drones expected to be among the top gifts received this Christmas, NATS is urging would-be drone pilots to be sure of the rules and regulations before taking to the skies.

Richard Parker, founder and CEO of Altitude Angel commented: "We are delighted to be working with NATS, and are proud that the UK is taking a global lead in addressing this issue as we work to keep our skies safe for all aerial citizens. Partnerships like this are an essential first-step to bringing together drone pilots and other stakeholders, all working towards greater airspace safety, and laying the foundation for a future where drones and manned aircraft can coexist without incident."

In a recent study by the CAA, 90% of people agreed that adherence to the CAAs Dronecode is important but only 40% of drone owners were aware of it. Tools like Drone Assist are designed to help, as is the new website launched by NATS and the CAA called dronesafe.uk. The site, which is easily accessible directly within the app, provides further information on the rules around drone flying in the UK, including the

CAAs Drone Code and information on CAA-approved training courses.

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About NATS

NATS is a leading air navigation services specialist, handling 2.3 million flights in 2015, covering the UK and eastern North Atlantic. NATS provides air traffic control from centres at Swanwick, Hampshire and Prestwick, Ayrshire.

NATS also provides air traffic control services at 14 UK airports including Heathrow, Stansted, Manchester and Glasgow; at Gibraltar Airport and, in a joint venture with Ferrovial, at a number of airport towers in Spain.

Building on its reputation for operational excellence and innovation, NATS also offers aerodrome, data, engineering and consultancy solutions to customers worldwide, including airports, air traffic service providers and Governments. There is more information on the NATS website at www.nats.aero

About Altitude Angel

Altitude Angel is building the next-generation Cloud technologies that will support safe integration of drones into global airspace, connecting citizens, regulators, authorities and other stakeholders together in The Internet of Flying Things™.

Our GuardianUTM (Unmanned Traffic Management) platform provides essential safety and foundation services to drone pilots, manufacturers and developers to deliver enhanced situational awareness. www.altitudeangel.com