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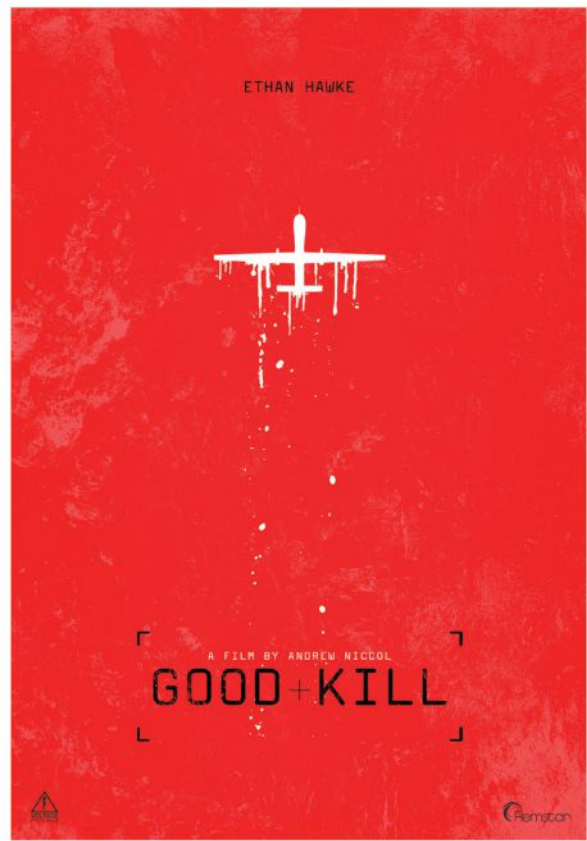


THE INTERNATIONAL LOCATION SCOUT'S GUIDE TO DRONE FILMMAKING LAWS

From governmental interference to cardiac defibrillators and Amazon groceries, everyone's got an eye to the sky. For filmmakers, well, the laws, they are a-changin'



By Paul Fraidenburgh



■ Posters for drone-centric narratives: Rick Rosenthal's *Drones* (AFI FEST 2014) and Andrew Niccol's *Good Kill* (Venice Film Festival and TIFF 2014)

Unpack your camera bags, switch your phone off airplane mode, and cancel your flight to Budapest. The most exciting filmmaking revolution of our time is happening right here in the United States.

A few moments ago, the Federal Aviation Administration granted regulatory exemptions to six film and production companies, allowing them to use camera-mounted unmanned aircraft systems (also known as drones) for motion picture and television filming in U.S. airspace. After decades of watching filmmakers walk out the door to take advantage of the business and financial incentives offered for motion picture productions overseas, this technological power shift may finally turn the tide.

The film industry exemptions were granted in response to petitions filed pursuant to Section 333 of the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, by which Congress created a legal mechanism for expedited authorization of commercial operations using small UAS (55 lbs and less). By enacting Section 333, Congress created a vehicle for filmmakers and other UAS operators to "ask for permission" from the FAA to legally operate UAS for commercial purposes. After much speculation about the FAA's readiness to carry out the intent of Congress, the

FAA's announcement in late September that it would grant the filmmaking exemptions triggered a wave of optimism from filmmakers around the globe.

News of the successful Section 333 petitions brings renewed attractiveness to the U.S. as a filming location for cutting-edge filmmakers wishing to incorporate the incredibly nimble UAS technology into their craft. Major motion picture companies have previously conducted UAS filming operations in Europe and Australia to shoot a handful of well-known motion pictures, including the 2012 James Bond *Skyfall* film. Now that the FAA has created a clear roadmap for legal UAS operation, however, filmmakers who previously considered navigating the murky waters of European and Australian drone regulations are scheduling their productions stateside.

Many countries have failed to keep pace with UAS technology by investing the time and money needed to research, test, and appropriately regulate unmanned aircraft. By partnering with NASA and university research teams across the country, the FAA has taken a proactive stance towards integrating UAS into filmmaking and other industries including precision agriculture, pipeline inspection, and package delivery.

As the FAA continues to work toward the ultimate goal of developing a comprehensive set of UAS regulations, Section 333 will remain the keystone of commercial UAS operations in the U.S. This is especially true in light of the Office of Inspector General's recent Audit Report to the Department of Transportation, explaining that "unresolved technological, regulatory, and privacy issues... will prevent FAA from meeting Congress' September 30, 2015 deadline" for adopting a comprehensive set of UAS regulations. Until then, filmmakers wishing to file Section 333 petitions to operate UAS prior to the FAA's release of a comprehensive set of regulations view the precedent set by last month's wave of successful filmmaker petitions as a sign of good things to come.



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