

# Flying Drone Aware

The increasing popularity of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) or 'drones' brings with it a greater need for awareness from all aviation participants.

**G**rowing numbers of unmanned aircraft mean growing numbers of occurrence reports, but the reports aren't all about drones behaving badly.

It's important to remember that RPAS pilots have just as much right to use New Zealand airspace as other aviation participants.

All aviators need to be alert to their potential presence, particularly in areas set aside specifically for their use.

There are a number of 'danger areas' across the country in which RPAS operations may be taking place. Danger areas for model flying are marked on the visual navigation charts (VNC) like this:



"The testing of new and emerging technology, or operations that involve flights extending beyond visual line of sight are also conducted within temporary restricted areas," says CAA RPAS specialist, Mark Houston.

Information about where and when these types of RPAS activities will take place is available through NOTAMs and AIP Supplements.

"It is really important that pilots check the VNC, NOTAMs and AIP Supplements carefully as part of every preflight briefing. These danger and restricted areas are not always active," says Mark.

Manned aircraft are able to fly through danger areas, but a pilot must first assess the risk doing so poses to their aircraft.

Don't forget that as well as RPAS, a danger area could have been specified for a range of other activities from quarry blasting to live firing, or even efflux.

Entry to an active restricted area requires prior approval from the designated administering authority. Information about this, including appropriate contact details, is contained in the en-route section of the AIP.

CAA Aviation Related Concern Investigating Officer, Roger Shepherd, suggests that danger and restricted areas can easily be avoided altogether.

"It's easy to fly around or over them, as they may only be half a mile wide and normally have a vertical height limit. They're not going to be any major impediment to whatever track you were going to take."

On first sight, a danger area may not appear to be active. A pilot could think a quarry isn't blasting because they don't see any smoke. But relying only on such visual cues is unreliable at best. With RPAS, it's entirely possible that you won't see them until it's too late.

While the location of danger and restricted areas is published, the existence of specially allocated council areas may not be.

To give clarity to the RPAS community, some councils are designating tracts of their land specifically for the purpose of drone or model aircraft use.

Recently, a helicopter mistakenly landed in such an area, forcing a local drone operator to avoid an incident by quickly bringing their RPAS to the ground.

"Conventional aircraft operators have to research the land they're going to operate from. Although there isn't anything explicitly requiring them to get landholder permission to land, there are clear safety reasons why they should do so," says Roger.

"By contacting the landowner, a pilot may find out that a farmer has a wire across their paddock, or that a council has approved a park for RPAS flying.

"It's just common sense and common courtesy, and is good basic airmanship."

Check with your local council for more information on their RPAS policies, or see the Airshare web site, [www.airshare.co.nz](http://www.airshare.co.nz), "My Flights > Property Owner Consent Information". ■

