

Drone industry calls for better awareness after close call with plane in Ottawa

'There's no purpose' to fly drone that high, says Unmanned Systems Canada

By CBC Radio's Ottawa Morning, [CBC News](#) Posted: Apr 20, 2017 10:51 AM ET Last Updated: Apr 20, 2017 10:51 AM ET



The commercial drone industry in Canada wants clearer regulations and more public awareness about use close to airports after a close call between a drone and a plane in Ottawa this week. (Matt Rourke/Associated Press)

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An association representing drone users in Canada is calling for better public awareness and clearer regulations around flying drones after a close call with a plane near the Ottawa airport this week.

The crew of an Air Canada Jazz plane that left from Montreal [spotted a drone on its descent into the Ottawa International Airport late Tuesday afternoon](#). It was able to land safely, after the pilot said the drone narrowly missed the aircraft's left wing at about 1,500 feet, or 457 metres.

"This is a cause for concern, and this public awareness needs to continue to stop these from happening in the future," said Mark Aruja, chair of the board of Unmanned Systems Canada, on CBC Radio's *Ottawa Morning*.



The flight crew aboard this twin turboprop airliner spotted a drone during their approach to the Ottawa airport on Tuesday. (Jetphotos.net/Alevik)

Aruja's organization represents commercial drone users, and he worries incidents like this could tarnish the image of people and companies who follow the rules. He believes there's "no purpose" to fly a commercial drone at that altitude, and that this was a recreational user.

"Certainly from a commercial perspective, if their operation's at 1,500 feet, then they're really unusual and they would be very highly regulated," he said. "So not a commercial operator, and why a recreational operator would be up there is beyond me. The regulatory limit is 300 feet [91 metres], and that's a long way up."

New federal regulations

Last month, the federal government [announced new regulations for flying drones in Canada](#), including a \$3,000 fine for flying a drone weighing more than 250 grams within nine kilometres of where an aircraft lands or takes off.

While Aruja supports moves to make the industry safer, he wants some clarity with the new rule specifically about how close drones can fly near smaller an locations for takeoff and landings.

"The difficulty is that it doesn't distinguish between Ottawa or Pearson and an emergency helipad at a hospital. It doesn't distinguish really between somebody landing seaplanes at their cottage, or a farmer's field where there's an airstrip. So it needs some refinement," he said.



Mark Aruja is the chairman of the board of Unmanned Systems Canada. (CBC)

Unmanned Systems Canada is developing a free mobile app to help drone users figure out how close they are to places where aircraft take off and land, but it needs financial support to get it off the ground.

Aruja says thousands of drones fly daily in Canada for commercial reasons without incident.

"These companies have it inherent to their own business that they have to operate safely and they do," he said.

"We have a tremendous safety culture within the industry, so we are extremely concerned when we hear about these incidents, and we certainly are tremendously encouraged that the minister has taken steps to put out this interim regulation."