

In Support of Public Power Utilities’ Use of Unmanned Aerial Aircraft in Utility-Related Operations

1 Unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as “drones,” are aircraft operated with no human pilot aboard.
2 These can include autonomous aircraft and remotely-piloted aircraft. Autonomous drones are not yet
3 technologically developed enough for safe commercial use, but remotely-piloted drones are and show
4 huge potential for use by electric power utilities. Drones can be used to survey electric power equipment,
5 assess damage, and aid in construction and repair. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and
6 federal aviation rules have failed to keep pace with this new technology.

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8 Government-operated (public) aircraft must comply with federal airspace and air-traffic rules, but
9 generally are exempt from civil airworthiness and airman certification requirements. This has eased the
10 use of traditional aircraft by governmental entities. However, drones cannot meet certain airspace rules.
11 For example, a pilot is required to scan the sky from the cockpit to “see and avoid” other aircraft. As a
12 result, the FAA has required governmental entities to obtain an FAA-issued Certificate of Waiver or
13 Authorization (COA) to operate drones. The process is complicated and unpredictable. Media accounts
14 indicate that many public safety departments currently use drones or are beginning to experiment with
15 drone use. The fact that many ignore or are unaware of the COA requirements indicates that the process
16 is too opaque and burdensome and that the FAA itself is incapable of adequately policing these
17 requirements.

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19 The FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 required the FAA to develop a plan to integrate civil
20 unmanned aerial vehicles into the national airspace system and simplify the process for state and local
21 governmental entities seeking a COA.

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23 The FAA on February 1, 2015, published proposed rules providing clear guidelines for civil operations of
24 drones weighing less than 55 pounds, operated within eyesight of the operator, operated only during
25 daylight hours, and flown by “operators” vetted by the Transportation Security Administration and who
26 have passed an FAA-approved aeronautical test. These rules would not change the COA process, but
27 governmental entities could apply to have their operations regulated by these civil drone rules, rather than
28 operating under a COA. The option to adopt these civil drone rules would be of little use in many of the
29 operations where drones would be of most use to public power utilities, including surveying and assessing
30 equipment in remote locations and aiding operations which occur outside daylight hours.

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32 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:** That the American Public Power Association (APPA)
33 believes unmanned aerial aircraft (drones) could be beneficial to the operation of public power utilities,
34 including for surveying electric power equipment, assessing damage, and aiding in construction and
35 repair; and

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37 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:** That current Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and
38 federal aviation laws have failed to keep pace with this emerging technology; and

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40 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:** That FAA regulations and federal aviation laws should facilitate, not
41 impede, the responsible use of drones by public power utilities.

**As adopted June 9, 2015, by the membership of the American Public Power Association at its
annual meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota.**