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Calling all drone airspace security companies: FAA seeks participants in research program to test unmanned aircraft systems detection and mitigation technologies at airports

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On 21 August 2020, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) published a Call for White Papers to identify eligible manufacturers, vendors, and integrators of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS or drone) detection and/or mitigation technologies/systems for participation in the FAA's Airport UAS Detection and Mitigation Research Program. The announcement follows on the heels of the joint advisory guidance on the legalities of UAS detection and mitigation technology recently published by the FAA, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Communications Commission, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. We previously published an article discussing the joint advisory guidance which you can access here.

The FAA's Airport UAS Detection and Mitigation Research Program stems from Section 383 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, which directed the FAA to test and evaluate technologies/systems that detect and/or mitigate risks posed by UAS at five airports. Manufacturers, vendors, and integrators of UAS detection and mitigation technologies/systems have until **5 October 2020** (45 days from publication) to respond to the FAA announcement.

As part of the research program, the FAA will evaluate at least 10 technologies/systems that have the ability to detect and/or mitigate UAS in a civil airport environment. Similar to the counter-UAS authorities granted to a handful of federal security agencies, for purposes of conducting the research program, the FAA is excepted from various Title 18 provisions and other federal laws that would otherwise present legal implications associated with UAS detection and mitigation activities.

The FAA's Airport UAS Detection and Mitigation Research Program is divided into three tasks:

- **Task 1 UAS Detection Testing and Evaluation**: Initial testing and evaluation will occur at Atlantic City International Airport, New Jersey (KACY). The FAA will operate the UAS detection equipment; however, the vendor will be responsible for providing necessary

training to operate the systems. The system will be tested for a period of 60 days against a variety of UAS platforms, in various weather conditions, and during various times of day.

- **Task 2 UAS Mitigation Testing and Evaluation:** Participants with technologies/systems that offer mitigation, either as a "standalone" system or in conjunction with a detection capability, will be tested at KACY in conjunction with the testing and evaluation occurring under Task 1. As part of Task 2, participants will need to demonstrate that their technology/system is capable of protecting KACY's 2,300 acre air operation area by mitigating UAS targets.

- **Task 3 Field Activities for UAS Detection and Mitigation Testing and Evaluation at Additional Airports:** Following KACY testing, the FAA plans to deploy and test/evaluate any "graduated" UAS detection and mitigation technologies/systems at an additional airport to validate data collected at KACY in different operational environments. Additional participating airports will be selected through a separate solicitation to be issued by the FAA. The first initial deployment for Task 3 could be as early as January 2021, with later deployments happening closer to the end of 2021. The period of performance under Task 3 is estimated to be approximately 14 months.

To be eligible for participation in the FAA's Airport UAS Detection and Mitigation Research Program, manufacturers, vendors, and integrators of UAS detection and/or mitigation technologies/systems will need to submit white papers addressing the specific areas described in Tasks 1, 2, and 3, as appropriate, and address the other topic areas covered in the FAA's Call for White Papers. The FAA anticipates that selected participants for the research program may receive a total of up to US$150,000 for completion of all tasks.

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