DRONE WITH CAMERAS ILLEGAL IN THE UAE, OWNERS TOLD

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Drone enthusiasts who fly the gadgets equipped with cameras are breaking a little-known law that has been in force for nine months, they were told on Monday.

In addition, few owners know that they are required to register their drone with the General Civil Aviation Authority.

The rules came into force last April, three months after recreational drones strayed on to flight paths at Dubai airport and grounded passenger planes.

Compliance with the rules is difficult because most drones come with inbuilt cameras, and because it is not possible to register with the authority at the point of sale.

“Only a limited number of private drone operators have knowledge of the law regarding entering civil airspace, air traffic control and avoidance procedures and safety issues surrounding that,” said Mohammed Al Dossari of the GCAA.

The authority will launch a campaign this year to educate consumers about the rules, and they will

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publish a map showing airspace from where drones are banned.

In the meantime, consumers are confused, particularly about the ban on cameras. “They’ll have to start removing the cameras from the drones sold here as I think most of them have them,” said Sean Blacksmith, from the UK.

“It’s going to be very difficult to enforce that rule and I don’t think it’s fair to blame the buyer because you don’t make much of a choice as the camera is already on the drone,” Mr Blacksmith said.

Imran Yousif, 22, from Pakistan, had been considering buying a small drone as a birthday present for his nephew but was having second thoughts.

“The problem is that no one will register it because it’s too easy for them not to at the moment – and then you have the added problem of the cameras,” he said.

“I can understand the concerns the government has about safety but I think it should first ask the manufacturers not to include cameras or make them easy to remove.

“Otherwise it’s very difficult for a normal person to understand what they should do.”

Vinod Kumar, manager of Ultimate Hobby in Al Garhoud, said most people were unaware of the regulations.

“When someone buys a drone from us we inform them that they must register with the GCAA, because it’s a requirement and they could get into trouble if they don’t,” he said.

“I would say for most people thinking about buying a drone, they have no idea.

“If you go to the malls and buy a drone no one will tell you that this has to be done and I think that is a problem.

“There should be some kind of registering once the drone is bought in the shop, otherwise people will forget or some will not bother at all.”

A manager at the Hobby Centre in Al Garhoud said shops should be given an official booklet detailing the rules and regulations for drone operators to follow.

“This way the retailer can better inform the customer when he is buying the drone,” he said.

“For our own shop we make sure we have Emirates ID and contact information about the customer just in case there is an accident or if the drone is flown in a restricted area.

“Drones all have their own serial number so if there is an incident I can easily check who the owner is and have the details.

“This is not something the government has advised us to do, it’s something we felt was important to do ourselves.”

Another GCAA official, Waleed Al Riyami, said: “We had a case recently when Abu Dhabi Airport had to be closed for an hour because a private drone came close to its airspace.

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“These are the kinds of things we hope to prevent in future by having campaigns to educate the public.”

Meanwhile, the panel of judges for the second UAE Drones for Good competition has been announced and features a host of experts from academia in the UAE and abroad.

About 20 teams will compete in the semi-final stage of the national and international categories on February 4, with a US$1?million (Dh3.67m) first prize in the international and Dh1m national categories up for grabs.

To register a drone or for more information, visit the GCAA website at www.gcaa.gov.ae.

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