

Aviation agency permits use of drones

Kenyans can now fly drones after the government legalised their use in the country. The Kenya Civil Aviation Authority (KCAA) said the remote-piloted aircraft will be operated within guidelines to be approved by Parliament. The guidelines also set out penalties for violators.



This is a relief to those who own the devices and those whose equipment was confiscated. The KCAA said it has given a six-month period for registration with the authority before use.

Licence fees

Director General Gilbert Kibe said users will be charged registration and licence fees, which will vary between \$600 (Sh60,000) and \$2,300 (Sh230,000) depending on the purpose of use.



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The regulations do not apply to State aircraft, hot air balloons, airships and toys. Drones can be used for sports, private surveillance and commercial purposes, the authority said.

"An applicant must demonstrate general knowledge, flight performance and navigation skills to be allowed to acquire a drone," Mr Kibe told journalists in Nairobi.

Cost

The fees could however be punitive to budding photographers, filmmakers and entrepreneurs but which the authority defended saying the decision is to restrict unauthorised use.

The cheapest drone in the market currently costs about Sh100,000. The prices are lower for second-hand devices.

Thuku Kariuki, a freelance filmmaker in Nairobi, told the Nation the costly fees will discourage photographers and filmmakers from using the devices.

"Look at it like this, I am a filmmaker using the drone to better my films. These charges have already added huge costs for no service at all," he argued.



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For sports and recreational purposes, an applicant will be required to pay \$600. These recreational activities will be confined to registered clubs.

Those planning to purchase the drones for private use will part with \$1,100 while a commercial user will pay \$2,300. These charges are inclusive of registration and licensing fees.

"For private use, the fee may be lower by \$200 if the applicant already has a foreign licence, in which case the licence validation fee will be applicable," Mr Kibe said.

A temporal permit will cost \$1,500 for both private and commercial use.

Regulation

The rules, which were first published last October, will apply to importation, assembling, manufacturing, maintenance and operating the devices.

While the devices have been in use by independent photographers, filmmakers and media houses, they have remained largely unregulated.

Currently, Kenya only permits the use of drones for recreational and private use.

Red Cross and technology giant Facebook are some of the organisations that have already requested for permits to operate the devices.

Any person who contravenes the regulations will be liable, upon conviction, to a fine not exceeding Sh5 million or six months jail term or both.

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