



Safety Center RPA Branch

Who we are & how we help you!

Air Traffic Control & Airspace

The Air Force Safety Center Remotely Piloted Aircraft Branch at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., employs an air traffic control and airspace subject matter expert. The primary responsibility of the SME is safely integrating RPAs in the National Airspace System. For instance, the ATC and airspace SME is a key player when analyzing RPA sense-and-avoid risk management and safety case studies. By making sure airspace characteristics and airworthiness standards are in compliance with airspace regulations, RPAs are able to fly in the NAS without visual observers or chase aircraft.

An additional function of the airspace SME is coordinating small unmanned aircraft systems airspace intrusion data and establishing aviation hazard mitigation procedures associated with the recent sUAS proliferation. According to the Federal Aviation Administration, 1.3 million sUAS pilots are expected to apply for flying licenses by 2020, therefore the safety center is focusing efforts on how to safely manage congested airspace now and in the future.

With a combined eight years of air traffic experience through the U.S. Air Force and as a

contracted FAA controller in Hawaii and Idaho, the ATC and airspace SME also serves as the AFSEC POC for Hazardous Air Traffic Report analysis and quality control. From that, the ATC and airspace SME provides trend analysis on HATR information and serves as an end-of-process check on reports in the Air Force Safety Automated System database.

The final role of the ATC and airspace SME is providing Safety Investigation Board support. If there is an airspace and/or ATC controller situation during the analysis or recommendation phase, input is given by the ATC and airspace SME.

There are a number of challenges unique to the RPA community. Whether it's the inability for RPAs to satisfy the see and avoid requirement for flight, dealing with the rampant sUAS growth around the world, or championing a proactive safety culture, AFSEC's goal is to lead the way as recognized worldwide experts identifying solutions to issues across the RPA community. In recent history, the ATC and airspace SME has achieved successes by aiding sense-and-avoid projects at multiple locations, developed a 10-year database for HATR information, and even served as a technical advisor for the U.S. delegation at the 39th International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) General Assembly.

For questions about ATC, airspace, sUAS intrusions, HATRs, or RPAs, sUAS proliferation and associated safety/security hazards, contact the ATC and airspace SME at HQAFSC.SEFQ@us.af.mil or call (505)846-0302 (DSN: 246-0302).