

Legal Framework for the Development of an Unmanned Vehicle System Industry in Virginia

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The Commonwealth of Virginia is today a global leader in the development, testing and manufacturing of unmanned vehicles. What makes Virginia a leader in this sector is a unique combination of attributes that include:

- A combination of sea, land and air state supported facilities for the development of unmanned vehicles
- Pro-business climate
- One of the top educational systems in the Nation (K-12, universities and technical schools)
- Technology infrastructure
- Industry specific trade associations and alliances that promote and lobby in favor of the unmanned vehicles industry
- Strong state and federal support with strong backing from law enforcement and military branches
- Legal and regulatory framework that supports the development and growth of the industry

Virginia unmanned vehicles system companies have been able to grow their capabilities because the Commonwealth of Virginia offers the right climate and facilities for the further development of this type of industry. This includes the development of a legislative / legal framework that eliminates present and future impediments to growth, and ride along on the states long history of cooperation with federal regulatory agencies such as the Federal Aviation Administration, NASA, NOAA and the U.S. Department of Defense and its branches.

In addition, Virginia Economic Development Partnership established the Virginia Unmanned Systems Initiative to work with other business sector associations to stimulate efforts directly related to promoting the development of a local unmanned systems industry. The following entities are part this initiative:

- Virginia Center for Innovative Technologies
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- Unmanned Systems Association of Virginia
- Aerospace & Ocean Engineering Center at Virginia Tech
- Virginia Automated Corridors

- Mid-Atlantic Aviation Partnership

These entities worked together to create the perfect business climate for companies in this sector via state legislation that offers ample flexibility on how and where unmanned vehicles can be tested. They also established R&D facilities specific to the industry needs.

The creation of a legal framework as a precursor to attracting this industrial sector to Virginia is part of well-designed economic development strategy to showcase the Commonwealth of Virginia as the preeminent location for unmanned systems development, testing and commercialization. The following is an example of the laws and regulations passed by the Virginia General Assembly to promote the development of unmanned vehicle systems and technology.

In addition, the state has taken advantage of a number of factors to create an ideal location for conducting unmanned naval vehicle research and development. First, its location in the Atlantic Ocean and being part of the Joint Atlantic & Chesapeake Ranges Cooperative test range. Second, its long history and relationship with the Navy. These factors create an ideal platform for unmanned surface vehicles and underwater unmanned vehicles research and development.