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New Drone Rules Take Effect October 13—What Operators Should Do Now

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Effective October 13, 2026, a new Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rule will restrict authorization of certain new drones and drone equipment that contain covered foreign-made communications, navigation, camera, sensor, or other electronic components. The rule targets logic-bearing parts made by companies named on the Covered List. It excludes entries based on where a product is made, such as foreign-made drones, unless the maker is separately listed.

The rule is not a blanket requirement that every drone use only U.S.-made parts. Instead, its main effect is to keep newly covered equipment from getting FCC authorization and entering the U.S. market.

What this means for existing fleets. The rule does not affect equipment already authorized. Models the FCC has already authorized can stay on the market. Pending applications on October 13 receive transitional protection. That protection may not apply, however, if a manufacturer changes or replaces a covered component.

Federal contractors face additional restrictions. FAR clause 52.240-1, effective March 13, 2026, prohibits covered contractors from delivering unmanned aircraft systems barred by the Federal Acquisition Security Council (FASC). Since December 22, 2025, contractors have also been barred from using these systems to perform federal contracts. They are also barred from using federal funds to buy or operate them. Before proposing or using any drone on a federal contract, contractors must check the FASC list in the government's System for Award Management (SAM).

Remember import duties on foreign components. Since September 3, 2026, tariffs of up to 100 percent can apply on imported UAS and components, after a Presidential Proclamation on August 13, 2026 under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act. This may impact the economics of importing foreign-made components, on top of the new FCC rule.

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Recommended Actions

- Inventory your fleet. Record model numbers, approval status, acquisition dates, and key component suppliers.
- Review contracts. Determine whether federal contracting or agency-specific sourcing restrictions apply.
- Document compliance. Keep FCC authorizations, manufacturers' certifications, and component-origin records.
- Plan replacements carefully. Before upgrading or swapping components, confirm that the change won't require a new FCC authorization or create a contract compliance problem.
- Strengthen supply chain compliance: Review tariff obligations when importing any foreign components and confirm compliance with U.S. Customs and Border Protection requirements.

Bottom line: These requirements are highly fact-specific. Before replacing or upgrading equipment, operators should evaluate each aircraft, use case, funding source, and contract. RSHC LLC can assist with each of these recommendations.

Regulatory Background

The FCC's Third Report and Order (FCC 26-50) "Protecting Against National Security Threats to the Communications Supply Chain Through the Equipment Authorization Program" final rule amended 47 C.F.R. § 2.903(b)(2). Section 2.903(a) prohibits equipment authorization for covered equipment, and the 2026 rule extends that restriction to devices containing a covered "logic-bearing hardware component," such as a processor, chipset, module, or other digital component produced by an entity on the FCC's Covered List.

Key provisions for drone operators

47 C.F.R. § 2.903: Prohibits authorization of covered equipment and devices that incorporate covered logic-bearing components.

47 C.F.R. § 1.50002: Includes foreign-produced uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) critical components, subject to specified exemptions or government determinations.

47 C.F.R. § 2.1043: Governs changes to equipment that has already received FCC authorization. Under the new rule, certain changes require recertification rather than treatment as a permissive change.

The final rule takes effect October 13, 2026.

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