

PANORAMIC

DRONE REGULATION

Japan

LEXOLOGY

Drone Regulation

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GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Basic rules and regulators

What basic rules govern the operation of remotely piloted aircraft and unmanned aircraft (drones) in your jurisdiction? Which regulatory bodies are charged with enforcing these rules?

In Japan, the operation of remotely piloted aircraft and unmanned aircraft (drones) is regulated mainly by the Civil Aeronautics Act and the Act on Prohibition of Flight of Small Unmanned Aircraft over Important Facilities and Surrounding Areas (the Drone Act).

The Civil Aeronautics Act establishes an unmanned aircraft (drone) registration system, a system for drone flight permission or approval, regulations governing drone flight methods, an unmanned aircraft (drone) certification system, an unmanned aircraft (drone) remote pilot skill certificate system, and penalties.

Furthermore, this Act was amended in 2025, primarily as follows:

- all new flight permit and authorisation applications submitted from 1 October 2025 onwards will require third-party liability insurance when flying unmanned aircraft (drones) with a total weight of 25kg or more;
- the application procedure for drone flight permission or approval has been streamlined, enabling electronic submissions via the new simplified form on the Drone/UAS Information Platform System 2.0 (DIPS), which is expected to reduce processing times. Also, due to this change in the application form, flight permission or approval amendments or renewals obtained prior to 24 March 2025 will not be possible and a new application will be required; and
- from 5 December 2025 onwards, simplified procedures for flight permission applications based on private drone operator qualifications, such as those from unmanned aircraft (drones) schools, will cease.

The competent authority for drone regulations under the Civil Aeronautics Act is the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT). The MLIT has published an overview of drone regulations and [guidelines](#) based on the Civil Aeronautics Act ([Flight Rules for Unmanned Aircraft \(Drones and Model Aircraft, etc\)](#)).

Regulations under the Civil Aeronautics Act

Unmanned aircraft (drones) subject to regulation under the Civil Aeronautics Act are those with a weight (the combined weight of the air-frame and battery) of 100g or more.

The principal regulations and procedures stipulated by the Civil Aeronautics Act for flying unmanned aircraft (drones) subject to regulation are as follows:

1. Drone registration and display of registration mark.
2. Flight rules (application for flight permission or approval for specific flights).
3. Procedures required after obtaining permission or approval (submission of flight plans or recording in-flight logs).
4. Reports on drone accidents, etc.

Drone registration and display of registration mark

Any person intending to fly a drone must first register the airframe of said drone and, in addition to displaying its registration mark on its body, equip it with a remote ID function. The MLIT has provided a [WEB Portal](#) and [Handbook](#) concerning unmanned aircraft (drone) registration.

Flight rules (application for flight permission or approval for specific flights)

Flying a drone in the following airspace or by the following methods (hereinafter referred to as Specified Flight) is, in principle, prohibited and requires an application for flight permission or approval, unless certain conditions are met.

Furthermore, when considering drone flight locations, it is necessary to check regulations such as the Drone Act, which stipulates no-fly zones other than those covered by the Civil Aeronautics Act, as listed at the end.

Flight airspace falling under the category of a "specified flight":

- around airports;
- above densely inhabited districts;
- airspace for Emergency; and
- 150 metres or more above the ground

Flight method falling under the category of a specified flight:

- flying a drone at night;
- flying a drone beyond visual line of sight;
- flying a drone at a distance of 30 metres or more from persons, buildings or vehicles;
- flying above venues where large numbers of people gather, such as festivals and fairgrounds;
- transporting dangerous goods such as explosives by drone; and
- dropping objects from unmanned aircraft (drones).

Categories according to flight risk

Under the Civil Aeronautics Act, unmanned aircraft (drones) are categorised into Category III, II or I depending on the level of risk associated with their flight, with unmanned aircraft (drones) presenting the highest risk falling into Category III and the permission or approval and procedures required to fly unmanned aircraft (drones) differ depending on their category. The categories are classified as follows:

- Category III: flights falling under the category of specified flight, involving flights over third-party airspace without entry control from said third party; these require flight permission or approval procedures under the Civil Aeronautics Act, without exception.

- Category II: flights falling under the category of specified flight conducted under a drone flight path where entry control measures under the flight route of an unmanned aircraft (drone) have been implemented, ensuring the flight does not fly over third-party airspace; these require flight permission or approval under the Civil Aeronautics Act, except in certain exceptional cases.
- Category I: flights not falling under the category of "specified flight"; these do not require flight permission or approval under the Civil Aeronautics Act.

The MLIT has provided a [flow chart](#) for determining the applicability of categories.

Regardless of where the drone is being flown, the person flying the drone must comply with the following rules:

- do not fly unmanned aircraft (drones) under the influence of alcohol or drugs;
- to ensure a safe flight, prior to flying the drone, confirm that the drone is free of hindrances to flight and that all other necessary preparations for flight have been completed;
- fly unmanned aircraft (drones) in such a way as to prevent collision with airplanes and other aircraft; and
- do not fly unmanned aircraft (drones) in a careless or reckless manner.

Acquisition of unmanned aircraft (drone) certification and unmanned aircraft (drone) remote pilot skill certificate

When operating unmanned aircraft (drones) categorised under Category III, Class 1 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) Certification must be obtained for the drone and the pilot must obtain an Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 1 Certificate before applying for permission or approval. In other cases, no certification or licensing is required.

When operating unmanned aircraft (drones) categorised under Category II, obtaining Class 2 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) Certification and an Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Class II Certificate may exempt operators from the requirement to obtain flight permission or approval.

For more detailed and up-to-date flight rules and flight permission or approval application procedures according to category, please refer to the [Unmanned Aircraft 'LEVEL 4' Flight Web Portal](#) and [Unmanned Air Fright Permission/Approval Application Web Portal](#).

DIPS

Applications relating to unmanned aircraft (drone) registration, permission or approval, etc, relating to drone flights are submitted via the Drone/UAS Information Platform System 2.0 ([DIPS](#)).

Procedures required after obtaining permission/approval (submission of flight plans or recording in-flight logs)

When conducting a specified flight pursuant to (2) above with MLIT's permission or approval, a flight plan detailing the date, time, route, etc, of said flight must be reported to MLIT in

advance via DIPS. For drone flights that do not fall under the category of specified flight, it is recommended that a flight plan also be reported via DIPS.

Persons conducting a specified flight pursuant to (2) above with the MLIT's permission or approval must keep the flight logbook and enter all necessary items about the journey log, daily inspection log, and inspection and maintenance record.

Reports on drone accidents, etc

In the event of any death or injury (including bodily harm) to persons, damage to property, collision or contact with aircraft, or the risk thereof, arising from the flying of a drone or in the event of a drone catching fire (limited to occurrences during flight), such incidents must be reported to the MLIT (the authority that granted the permission or approval or the authority with jurisdiction over the flight route).

Furthermore, should any injuries occur as a result of the drone flight, the drone must be immediately grounded and necessary measures, such as providing aid to the injured person, must be taken.

Rules relating to drone flights other than the Civil Aeronautics Act

The Drone Act

The Drone Act was enacted following an incident in April 2015 where a drone crashed onto the roof of the Prime Minister's Official Residence. It restricts the airspace around important national facilities, etc (generally within 1000 meters) as no-fly zones. These designated facilities include the Prime Minister's Official Residence, the Imperial Palace, foreign diplomatic missions, airports, etc. The competent authority for the Drone Act is the Ministry of Defence, which also provides [information](#) concerning the Drone Act. When flying a drone within said no-fly zones, the consent of the facility manager, etc, must be obtained and a Notification must be submitted to the Public Safety Commission via the police station with jurisdiction over the area surrounding the facilities at least 48 hours prior to the drone's flight. The National Police Agency has provided specific [Information](#) regarding facilities subject to no-fly zones.

It should be noted that the Drone Act also regulates small drones weighing less than 100g.

Furthermore, under the 2026 amendment, the no-fly zones have been expanded to include the grounds and areas of designated facilities and their surrounding areas of approximately 1,000 metres (prior to the amendment, approximately 300 metres). In addition, the same amendment established new penalties for flights over no-fly zones, in addition to the existing penalties for flights over the grounds of designated facilities.

Ordinances, etc, established by local government

Local government may prohibit drone flights over parks, etc, under their management based on ordinances, etc. Additionally, during periods when specific events are being held, requests may be made to refrain from flying unmanned aircraft (drones) at the event venue.

By utilising DIPS's "flight plan notification function", it is possible to identify airspace where flight is prohibited under local ordinances, as well as the positional information of aircraft flying in the same airspace as the drone in question and details of take-off and landing sites.

Drone flights over roads, rivers, etc

When flying a drone above a road, a "permit for road use" as stipulated by the Road Traffic Act may be required in certain situations, such as when filming activities cause significant disruption to general traffic due to crowds gathering on the road. However, the circumstances necessitating such a permit are limited.

When attempting to fly a drone over a river (including dams and their reservoirs), permission or an application may be required, or the river administrator and surrounding local government may have established rules governing river use.

Flying unmanned aircraft (drones) over land owned by other people

Flying a drone over land owned by a third party may constitute an infringement of the landowner's property rights, depending on the altitude and manner of flight. The landowner's property rights are understood to extend to the airspace above the land to the "extent that the landowner's interests exist"; however, no uniform standard is set forth in laws and regulations regarding the "extent to which such interests exist". Therefore, this requires assessment on a case-by-case basis. For example, there are instances where the administrators of shrines and temples, including those designated as important cultural properties, prohibit drone flights over their premises by displaying signs, etc.

Radio Act

When flying unmanned aircraft (drones) using radio waves, compliance with the Radio Act is required. The Radio Act is administered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, which has provided information on licences, etc for the use of radio equipment used in unmanned aircraft (drones) via its [WEB portal](#) for radio wave utilisation.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Basic rules and regulators

What are the penalties for non-compliance with the laws and regulations governing drones?

The main penalties stipulated by the Civil Aeronautics Act are as follows:

- any person who fails to take measures to prevent danger, such as halting drone flight and providing aid to injured persons in the event of an accident, shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than two years or a fine not exceeding ¥1 million;
- any person who flies a drone that is not registered under the Civil Aeronautics Act shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than one year or a fine not exceeding ¥500,000;

- any person who flies a drone over airspace above roads, parks, squares or other public places whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than one year or a fine not exceeding ¥300,000; and
- any person who violates other requirements under the Civil Aeronautics Act shall be punished by a fine not exceeding ¥500,000, ¥300,000 or ¥100,000, depending on the nature of the violation.

Any person who flies a drone in violation of the Drone Act over designated facilities and their specified grounds (red zone) shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than one year or a fine not exceeding ¥500,000. Furthermore, under the 2026 amendment to the Drone Act, new penalties have been established for drone flights not only over designated facilities and their specified grounds (red zone) but also over the expanded no-fly zones (areas within approximately 1,000 metres surrounding the red zone, ie, the yellow zone), punishable by imprisonment for not more than six months or a fine not exceeding ¥500,000.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Classification

Is there any distinction between public and private drones, as well as between leisure use and commercial use?

There is no difference between public and private unmanned aircraft (drones). However, in principle, when the national government of Japan, a local government, or a person commissioned by the national government of Japan or a local government flies a drone for search and rescue purposes during the occurrence of an accident or disaster, as a special exception, the regulations under the Civil Aeronautics Act do not apply.

There is no difference between leisure use and commercial use.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Classification

Is there a weight-based or other classification system for drones resulting in the application of different rules?

The Civil Aeronautics Act defines an "unmanned aircraft" as one that meets all of the following requirements:

- aircraft, rotary-wing aircraft, gliders or airships suitable for aviation;
- structurally incapable of carrying passengers;
- capable of being flown by remote control or autopilot; and
- weighing 100g or more (combined weight of the main unit and battery).

Unmanned aircraft weighing less than 100g are not subject to the regulations of the Civil Aeronautics Act.

Furthermore, the Civil Aeronautics Act imposes stricter regulations on unmanned aircraft (drones) weighing over 25kg than those under this weight threshold. Moreover, from 1 October 2025, when submitting new flight permission or approval applications to fly unmanned aircraft (drones) with a total weight of 25kg or more, third-party liability insurance cover is required.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Classification

Is there any legal distinction between completely autonomous drones and remotely piloted drones?

No, but the necessary information to be provided to the MLIT on the application for permission or approval differs to some extent.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

DESIGN AND MANUFACTURE

Regulation

Do specific rules regulate the design and manufacture of drones in your jurisdiction?

With respect to unmanned aircraft (drones) weighing 100g or more to be flown outdoors, the unmanned aircraft (drones) certification system and unmanned aircraft (drones) type certification system under the Civil Aeronautics Act apply to their design and manufacture.

The unmanned aircraft (drones) certification system applies to each individual unmanned aircraft (drone) owned by the user. When conducting high-risk flights in specified airspace or by specified methods (referred to as "specified flight"), an unmanned aircraft (drones) certification must be obtained for the unmanned aircraft (drone).

Unmanned aircraft (drones) certification is categorised into two types depending on the level of flight risk.

Specified flights conducted over third parties (Category III flights) invariably require Class 1 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) certification. For specified flights conducted within an area where third-party entry is restricted (Category II flights), obtaining Class 2 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) certification and a Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 2 Certificate may render flight permission or approval unnecessary. Unmanned aircraft (drones) certification is not required for flights that do not fall under the category of specified flight (Category I flights).

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) has published a [flow chart](#) on its web portal to assist in determining the required certifications.

Applications for unmanned aircraft (drones) certification are, in principle, submitted online via the Drone/UAS Information Platform System (DIPS).

To obtain unmanned aircraft (drones) certification, it is necessary to undergo an inspection by the MLIT or a government-registered inspection organisation to confirm that the design,

manufacturing process, and current condition of the unmanned aircraft (drones) comply with the prescribed safety standards; provided, however, for unmanned aircraft (drones) of a type that has received unmanned aircraft (drones) type certification, all or part of the inspection required for unmanned aircraft (drones) certification may be exempted.

Details regarding the application process and required documents are summarised in [materials](#) published by the MLIT.

The unmanned aircraft (drones) type certification system is aimed at mass-produced unmanned aircraft (drones) designed by manufacturers.

Similarly to the unmanned aircraft (drones) certification system, unmanned aircraft (drones) type certification is classified into Class 1 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) type certification or Class 2 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) type certification depending on their flight category.

Applications for unmanned aircraft (drones) type certification are also submitted via DIPS.

To obtain unmanned aircraft (drones) type certification, compliance with both the safety standards, which evaluate the safety of the aircraft design itself, and the uniformity standards, which evaluate the quality management system that enables consistent mass production in accordance with the design, is required.

The details of these standards are stipulated in '[The Inspection Manual of Safety and Uniformity Standards for Unmanned Aircraft Systems \(UAS\) Type Certificate, etc](#)' established by the MLIT. The English version of the revised edition dated 24 March 2025 (latest edition) has not yet been published.

Domestic product standards specifically targeting unmanned aircraft (drones) have not yet been established.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Manufacturing authorisation

Must drone manufacturers obtain any licences or other authorisation to carry out their business? Are manufacturers subject to any other specific rules?

There is no single, universally required licence or authorisation for engaging in the business of manufacturing unmanned aircraft (drones).

However, unmanned aircraft (drones) with a total weight of 150kg or more may be classified as 'aircraft' under the Aircraft Manufacturing Industry Act.

Business operators intending to manufacture or repair unmanned aircraft (drones) that fall under the definition of 'aircraft' in the Act must obtain prior permission from the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry for each factory and must manufacture and repair unmanned aircraft (drones) in accordance with methods approved by the Minister.

The weight threshold was relaxed from "100kg or more" to "150kg or more" in 2014 as unmanned aircraft (drone) manufacturing technology matured; the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry continues to review the appropriate regulatory state of affairs for unmanned aircraft (drones) under this Act at its [study panel](#) (available in Japanese only).

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Product liability

Do general product liability rules (or other specific liability rules) apply to the manufacture of drones?

The general product liability rules under the Product Liability Act apply to manufacturers of unmanned aircraft (drones).

In addition, Japan's Product Liability Act does not regard software itself, being intangible, as a "product" within the scope of the Act. However, products that incorporate software may fall within the scope of the Act as a whole. In other words, where an accident occurs due to a defect in software incorporated into a product, the software defect may be deemed a defect of the product itself and, in such cases, provided that a causal relationship is established between the defect and the damage, the manufacturer of the product may incur liability for damages under the Act.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Registration

Must drones be registered in a specific national registry? If so, who is entitled to register drones and what requirements and restrictions apply? Is the registry organised as an operator registry or an owner registry?

The amended Civil Aeronautics Act, which came into force on 20 June 2022, mandates that all unmanned aircraft (drones) weighing 100g or more must be registered with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) before being flown outdoors.

Registration applications can be submitted online via the Drone/UAS Information Platform System (DIPS) or by post.

Applications must be submitted by the owner of the unmanned aircraft (drone) (or their authorised representative), but the user's information (name, address, contact details) must also be registered.

Upon completion of the registration procedure, a registration ID is issued for the unmanned aircraft (drone) concerned.

The registration period is three years, and renewal applications can be submitted via DIPS.

[Examples of completed application forms \(English version\)](#) have been published by MLIT and, further, the specific operations of the registration system are comprehensively outlined in [the DIPS manual](#).

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Identification

Are drones identified through a marking system similar to that used for manned aircraft?

For unmanned aircraft (drones) weighing 100g or more to be flown outdoors, the Civil Aeronautics Act requires the physical display of a registration ID and, with certain exceptions, mandates the installation of a remote ID function. The MLIT has published a [handbook](#) regarding these identification requirements for unmanned aircraft (drones).

The owner of the unmanned aircraft (drone) must clearly display the registration ID issued for each aircraft in a durable manner on a part of the airframe that is not readily removable and is easily visible from the outside.

To be considered a "clear" display, characters must be at least 25mm high for aircraft weighing 25kg or more and at least 3mm high for aircraft weighing less than 25kg. They must also be displayed in a colour that clearly distinguishes them from the background.

Details regarding physical markings are stipulated in the [Unmanned Aircraft Registration Guidelines](#) (available only in Japanese) established by the Director-General of the Civil Aviation Bureau.

The term "remote ID function" refers to a function whereby the unmanned aircraft (drone) continuously transmits by radio signals, during flight, not only its identification information such as the registration ID, but also dynamic information including its location, speed, altitude and timestamp. Personal information about the registrants, users, etc, is not transmitted.

With the exception of certain cases, such as flying within designated areas where safety measures are implemented or flying while tethered to the ground with a sufficiently strong tether, unmanned aircraft (drones) weighing 100g or more must be equipped with a remote ID function when flown outdoors.

Remote ID devices are categorised as either built-in or external units. External units are also available for purchase from third parties. Remote ID devices must comply with [the prescribed technical specifications within Japan](#) (such as a transmission cycle of at least once per second). The Civil Aviation Bureau publishes the type information and manufacturer names of devices that conform to these specifications.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

CERTIFICATION AND LICENSING

Basic requirements and procedures

What certificates or licences are required to operate drones and what procedures apply?

Unmanned Aircraft (drones) certification comprises two categories (Class 1 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) Certification and Class 2 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) Certification), while drone pilot certificate also comprises two categories (Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 1 Certificate and Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 2 Certificate).

Under the Civil Aeronautics Act, unmanned aircraft (drones) flight is categorised into Category III, II or I based on the level of risk associated with their flight, with higher-risk unmanned aircraft (drones) falling into Category III and, the necessity of flight permission

or approval, unmanned aircraft (drones) certification and Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Certificate depends on the category. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) has provided a [flow chart](#) to determine the applicability of categories. Specified flight is classified as Category III or II and, in principle, requires flight permission or approval from the MLIT.

The term "specified flight" refers to flights that operate in airspace around airports, at altitudes of 150 metres above the ground, above densely inhabited district, or within airspace for emergency action, or the method of flight involves operations such as night flying, flying beyond visual line of sight, flying within 30 metres of people or property, flying over event sites, transporting hazardous materials or dropping objects.

Specified flight without third-party entry control falls under Category III, invariably requiring flight permission or approval from the MLIT, Class 1 Unmanned Aircraft (drones) for the unmanned aircraft (drones), and Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 1 Certificate for the pilot. In all other cases, the acquisition of unmanned aircraft (drones) certification and an Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Certificate is not mandatory.

Specified flight with third-party entry control falls under Category II, and acquiring Class 2 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification and an Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 2 Certificate may render flight permission or approval unnecessary.

Flights that do not fall into the category of a specified flight are classed as Category I and do not require flight permission or approval.

In addition, in 2026, a new framework was introduced under which certain aerial spraying operations involving pesticides and similar substances are exempt from the requirement to obtain flight permission or approval from the MLIT. Under this framework, even where an operation constitutes a Specified Flight – such as night flying, BVLOS flight, flying within 30 metres of persons or property, transporting hazardous materials or dropping objects—the operator need not obtain separate permission or approval, provided that certain prescribed requirements are met.

These requirements relate to, among other things, (1) the safety of unmanned aircraft (drones), including detailed inspection and maintenance standards, (2) pilot qualifications, training, and operational standards, (3) the organisational arrangements necessary to ensure safe operations, and (4) conditions governing operations conducted over densely inhabited districts.

The MLIT has also published a detailed manual entitled [Manual for Unmanned Aircraft \(Drones\) Operations](#) (available in Japanese only) which sets out these requirements and operational procedures.

To obtain unmanned aircraft (drones) certification, an application must be submitted to the MLIT or a registered inspection agency and an inspection must be conducted. Class 1 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification is applied for at the MLIT and Class 2 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification at a registered inspection agency. However, for an unmanned aircraft (drones) that has received type certification, all or part of the inspection may be omitted. Further information is available at [this website](#).

To obtain an unmanned aircraft pilot certificate, the following steps are required in the [following order](#):

- identification;

- taking training courses at a registered unmanned aircraft remote pilot training organisation;
- taking exams at the designated unmanned aircraft remote pilot certificate testing agency; and
- application for the issue of an unmanned aircraft remote pilot certificate.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Taxes and fees

Are certification and licensing procedures subject to any taxes or fees?

The fees for obtaining unmanned aircraft (drones) certification vary depending on whether it is Class 1 or Class 2, whether it has type certification, and whether it is new or used. When applying to the MLIT, the fee is set within a range between less than ¥10,000 and over ¥1 million. When applying to a registered inspection agency, the fees vary depending on the agency.

The cost of obtaining an unmanned aircraft remote pilot certificate varies depending on whether it is Class 1 or Class 2, and on the registered unmanned aircraft remote pilot training organisation. The total amount will be approximately ¥200,000 to ¥1 million.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Eligibility

Who may apply for certifications and licences? Do any restrictions apply?

There are no restrictions on obtaining unmanned aircraft (drones) certification.

Persons under the age of 16 are not eligible to apply for an unmanned aircraft remote pilot certificate. Furthermore, any person whose certificate application has been refused or deferred due to having committed an act in violation of the Civil Aeronautics Act, etc, or due to misconduct or gross negligence in the operation of unmanned aircraft (drones) is not eligible to apply for a certificate for a period of one year following the date of refusal or during any deferral period. Moreover, any person whose certificate has been revoked or suspended due to having committed an act in violation of the Civil Aeronautics Act, etc, or due to misconduct or gross negligence in the operation of unmanned aircraft (drones) is not eligible to apply for a licence for a period of two years following the date of revocation or during the suspension period. In addition, individuals who have a mental disorder or substance dependencies may still be eligible to apply for a licence, but their application may be refused or their certificate revoked.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Remote pilot licences

Must remote pilots obtain any certifications or licences to operate drones? If so, do the relevant procedures differ based on the type of drone or operation?

No specific certification or licence is required for remote pilots; however, when operating unmanned aircraft (drones) under Category III (specified flight without third-party entry control), operators must obtain Class 1 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification and an Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 1 Certificate. Furthermore, when operating unmanned aircraft (drones) under Category II (specified flight with third-party entry control), obtaining Class 2 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification and an Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 2 Certificate may render flight permission or approval unnecessary.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Foreign operators

Are foreign operators authorised to fly drones in your jurisdiction? If so, what requirements and restrictions apply?

Foreign nationals may also operate unmanned aircraft (drones) and there is little difference in the requirements between Japanese nationals and foreign nationals.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Certificate of airworthiness

Is a certificate of airworthiness required to operate drones? If so, what procedures apply?

No certificate of airworthiness is required; however, in flight permission or approval applications, unmanned aircraft (drones) are required to meet certain functional and performance assessment criteria from a safety perspective. For unmanned aircraft (drones) with a maximum take-off weight of 25kg or more, additional standards regarding robustness, durability, etc, have been stipulated. Furthermore, when flying a Category III (specified flight without third-party entry control), the acquisition of Class 1 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification is required. This certification ensures that the unmanned aircraft (drones)'s strength, structure and performance, including its design, manufacturing process, and current condition, comply with certain safety standards.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

One drone, one pilot

Does the "one drone, one pilot" rule apply in your jurisdiction?

No, the 'one drone, one pilot' rule does not apply. However, against the backdrop of increasing instances in recent years of multiple unmanned aircraft (drones) being flown simultaneously – such as in unmanned aircraft (drones) shows and infrastructure inspections using multiple

aircraft – the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) published the Guidelines for the Safe Flying of Multiple Unmanned Aircraft (available in Japanese only) in March 2025, which aims to maximise the assurance of drone flight safety while promoting the commercialisation and societal implementation of unmanned aircraft (drones). The MLIT subsequently published the [second edition of the Guidelines in June 2026](#) following demonstration projects and further consideration by a study group.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Maintenance

Do specific rules regulate the maintenance of drones?

Persons flying unmanned aircraft (drones) must confirm that the unmanned aircraft (drones) are free from any hindrance to flight and that all necessary preparations for flight have been completed before flying it. Specifically, it is necessary to confirm the unmanned aircraft (drones)'s condition, fuel load or remaining battery charge, and the operational status of the remote ID function. Furthermore, when confirming these, an external inspection and operational check of the drone must be performed. Also, according to the [Guidelines for the Safe Flying of Unmanned Aircraft \(Drones, Radio-Controlled Aircraft, etc\)](#) (2023) published by the MLIT, it is recommended that regular inspections and maintenance of the aircraft be carried out and that components be replaced promptly.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Basic operational rules and restrictions

What rules and restrictions apply to flights performed in "visual line of sight" (VLOS) and "beyond visual line of sight" (BVLOS)? Is there a distinction in this regard?

In principle, drone flights must be VLOS conducted. BVLOS flights constitute specified flights and require an application for flight permission or approval. Furthermore, to obtain permission or approval, in addition to complying with the basic criteria, [additional criteria](#) designed for BVLOS flights must be complied with and, particularly when conducting BVLOS flights without an assistant, strict additional criteria must be met. However, when BVLOS flights with third-party entry control fall under Category II, obtaining Class 2 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification and an Unmanned Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 2 Certificate may exempt operators from the requirement to obtain flight permission or approval. Conversely, BVLOS flights without third-party entry control fall under Category III, and flight permission or approval applications, Class 1 unmanned aircraft (drones) certification for the unmanned aircraft (drones) and an Aircraft Remote Pilot Class 1 Certificate for the pilot are required.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Basic operational rules and restrictions

What rules and restrictions apply to critical and non-critical operations? Is there a distinction in this regard?

Flying unmanned aircraft (drones) in any of the following ways constitutes a "specified flight" and is, in principle, prohibited. Specified flight requires a flight permission or approval application unless certain conditions are met:

- flying unmanned aircraft (drones) at night;
- flying unmanned aircraft (drones) beyond visual line of sight;
- flying unmanned aircraft (drones) at a distance of 30 metres or more from persons, buildings or vehicles;
- flying over venues where large numbers of people gather, such as festivals and fairgrounds;
- transporting dangerous goods such as explosives by unmanned aircraft (drones); or
- dropping objects from unmanned aircraft (drones).

In addition to BVLOS flights, [additional criteria](#) tailored to specific flight types – such as night flights, hazardous material transport and object drops – are established as criteria that should be met to obtain flight permission or approval. Please refer to [the Unmanned Aircraft 'LEVEL 4' Flight Web Portal](#) and [Unmanned Air Freight Permission/Approval Application Web Portal](#) for more details.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Transport operations

Is air transport via drone (eg, cargo and mail) regulated in your jurisdiction? If so, what requirements, limitations and restrictions apply?

There are no special regulations within Japan regarding air transport by unmanned aircraft (drones). The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has published [Guidelines Regarding the Delivery of Cargo via Drone](#) (2023) (available in Japanese only).

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Transport operations

Do any specific provisions governing consumer protection and tracking systems apply with respect to cargo and delivery operations via drone?

No.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Insurance requirements

What insurance requirements apply to the operation of drones?

To receive flight permission or approval, specified flight (Category III) without third-party entry control requires that the details of the third-party liability insurance pertaining to the unmanned aircraft (drones) (status of cover, insurer name, product name, amount of compensation) be stated to ascertain the status of such insurance cover. Further information is available at [this document](#) (available in Japanese only).

Specified flight (Category II) with third-party entry control, if flying a drone with a total weight of 25kg, requires that third-party liability insurance providing sufficient compensation for unforeseen incidents such as injury to third parties, traffic disruption, etc, be taken out. The same requirement applies to Level 3.5 flights, namely, flights over moving vehicles, trains or vessels without implementing third-party entry control measures by using onboard cameras and other specified measures. Further information is available at this document (available in Japanese only).

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Safety requirements

What safety requirements apply to the operation of drones?

When applying for permission or approval to conduct a specified flight, it is necessary to prepare a flight manual containing the details required to maintain an appropriate operational control system for flying unmanned aircraft (drones) or to maintain the systems necessary to ensure safety when flying unmanned aircraft (drones). The MLIT has provided the format for said manual.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

AIRSPACE

Air traffic control

How is air traffic control regulated in your jurisdiction? Which authority provides air traffic control services for drones?

Air traffic control is regulated primarily by the Civil Aeronautics Act. The Act stipulates that any aircraft must, in an air traffic control area or an air traffic control zone, be navigated in accordance with instructions which are given by the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), with regard to the order, time or method of take-off or landing, or the flight method. While there are no specific air traffic control services for unmanned aircraft (drones), the MLIT provides the Drone/UAS Information Platform System 2.0 ([DIPS](#)), which is used to report flight plans for unmanned aircraft (drones), etc.

Furthermore, in 2025, a new licensing program for UAS Traffic Management Service Providers (USPs) was introduced. Certified USPs are expected to coordinate overlapping flight plans on DIPS on behalf of operators. This is expected to improve the efficiency of coordination among the parties involved in flights and reduce the associated costs.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Restrictions

Are there any airspace restrictions on the operation of drones?

Under the Civil Aeronautics Act, the airspace surrounding airports, etc, the emergency service airspace, and the airspace at altitudes of 150 metres or above, which are designated as airspace where the flying of unmanned aircraft (drones) may affect the safety of aircraft navigation, and the airspace above any densely inhabited district that is so designated are in principle prohibited for flight (specified flight) and, when flying an unmanned aircraft (drones) in these areas, flight permission/approval from the MLIT is required.

Furthermore, under the Drone Act, the airspace above the grounds of important facilities such as the Prime Minister's Official Residence, the Imperial Palace, foreign diplomatic missions, and airports (red zone), as well as their surrounding areas (approximately 1,000 metres) (yellow zone), is regulated as no-fly zones. When flying a drone within these no-fly zones, the consent of the facility manager, etc, must be obtained, and a Notification must be submitted to the Public Safety Commission via the police station with jurisdiction over the area surrounding the facilities at least 48 hours prior to the drone's flight. The National Police Agency provides specific [information](#) regarding facilities subject to no-fly zones. The Ministry of Defence also provides [information](#) concerning the Drone Act.

MLIT and the National Police Agency published the overview of [the flight rules on Unmanned Aircraft](#).

In addition, there are cases where no-fly zones are designated under ordinances, etc, established by local governments, and cases where certain permits or applications are required for flights over roads, rivers, etc. By utilising DIPS's "Flight Plan Notification Function", it is possible to identify locations where local governments prohibit flights based on ordinances, as well as the positional information of aircraft flying in the same airspace as the drone in question and details of take-off and landing sites.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Take-off and landing

Must take-off and landing of drones take place in specific areas or facilities?

There are no requirements for unmanned aircraft (drones) to take-off or land in specific areas or facilities.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

LIABILITY AND ACCIDENTS

Cargo liability

Are there any specific rules governing the liability of drones for losses or damage to cargo?

At this time, there are no specific regulations governing liability for loss or damage to cargo carried by unmanned aircraft (drones). Therefore, liability for damages is determined in accordance with the agreements between the consignor and the operator of the unmanned aircraft (drones), and the provisions regarding compensation for damages in the Commercial Code and Civil Code.

However, the National New Smart Logistics Promotion Council formulated the [Guidelines for Drone Delivery Terms and Conditions Ver.1.0](#) in September 2024 (available in Japanese only), which sets out certain approaches to the contractual terms for drone delivery. In addition, the Guidelines on drone corridors published by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in 2025 (available in Japanese only) sets out certain approaches to the roles and allocation of responsibilities among drone corridor operators, drone operators and other relevant parties.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Third-party liability

Are there any specific rules governing the liability of drones for damages to third parties on the surface or in the air?

There are no special provisions regarding cases where damage is caused to a third party by unmanned aircraft (drones). The operator's liability for damages is determined based on the provisions of the Civil Code concerning tort.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Accident investigations

How are investigations of air accidents involving drones regulated in your jurisdiction?

The Japan Transport Safety Board investigates the causes of aviation accidents involving unmanned aircraft (drones) and the extent of damage and examines accident prevention measures, based on the Act for Establishment of the Japan Transport Safety Board.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Accident reporting

Is there a mandatory accident and incident reporting system for drone operators in your jurisdiction?

The Civil Aeronautics Act requires operators of unmanned aircraft (drones) to report to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) in the following cases:

- human casualties (including serious injuries);
- damage to property owned by a third party (including minor damage);
- collision or contact with an aircraft;
- incidents in which unmanned aircraft (drones) caught fire during flight;

- incidents in which unmanned aircraft (drones) became uncontrollable; and
- other circumstances that, while not resulting in an accident, have the potential to cause serious consequences as a major incident (eg, near-misses with aircraft, etc).

In the cases described above, where an incident is deemed to be an accident or a serious incident, it must be promptly reported using the accident reporting function of the Drone/UAS Information Platform System (DIPS). Should DIPS be unavailable, reports will be made to the MLIT or the regional aviation bureau by telephone, email, etc.

Matters to be reported include the date, time and location of occurrence, information on the operator and pilot, details of permission or approval, the aircraft's registration mark and type, the purpose and outline of the flight, the circumstances of the accident or incident, and details of any personal injury or property damage.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Safety management and risk assessment

Are drone operators required to implement safety management systems and risk assessment procedures within their organisation?

When operating unmanned aircraft (drones) categorised under specified flight (eg, over a densely inhabited district, at altitudes of 150 metres or above, beyond visual line of sight, etc), the operator is required to submit a flight plan in advance to the MLIT and take appropriate measures to avoid collisions with aircraft. Furthermore, when applying for flight permission or approval, the operator must provide documentation demonstrating that they have established the systems and procedures necessary to ensure safe flight operations. Please refer to [the Unmanned Aircraft 'LEVEL 4' Flight Web Portal](#) and [Unmanned Air Flight Permission/Approval Application Web Portal](#) for more details.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

ANCILLARY CONSIDERATIONS

Import and export control

Do specific import and export control rules apply to drones in your jurisdiction?

Under the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Act and the Export Trade Control Order, prior permission from the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry is required for exports of certain type of unmanned aircraft (drones).

Law stated - 14 July 2026

Data privacy and IP protection

How are personal data privacy and IP protection regulated in your country with specific reference to drone operations?

The protection of personal information relating to the operation of unmanned aircraft (drones) is governed by the Personal Information Protection Act and its guidelines.

Businesses that acquire information capable of identifying individuals (such as video, audio or location data) through the operation of unmanned aircraft (drones) must handle personal information appropriately in accordance with the Personal Information Protection Act. Their obligations include publicly disclosing the purpose of use, implementing security management measures and responding to requests from individuals to suspend use.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications has published the [Guidelines on the Handling of Footage Captured by Drones on the Internet](#) (available only in Japanese), which provide guidance on protecting personal data concerning footage captured by unmanned aircraft (drones).

These guidelines point out that using unmanned aircraft (drones) to film footage without the subject's consent and subsequently publishing it online may infringe upon the subject's privacy and portrait rights, potentially leading to civil, criminal, and or administrative liability. In addition, when filming or publishing footage, it is generally required to obtain the consent of the subject; however, if this is difficult, awareness is being raised to ensure that sufficient consideration is given during the filming stage and editing process.

Moreover, these guidelines encourage platform operators providing video-sharing services, etc, online to clarify designated points of contact for takedown requests and handle such requests appropriately.

Images and videos captured by unmanned aircraft (drones), as well as representations depicted in space through the movement of unmanned aircraft (drones) during drone shows, are protected as works under the Copyright Act, provided they satisfy the requirement of originality.

Law stated - 14 July 2026

UPDATE AND TRENDS

Sector trends and regulatory developments

Which industry sectors have seen the most development in the use of drones in your jurisdiction and which sectors are expected to see further development in future? Have there been any notable recent regulatory developments relating to drones?

In Japan, following the Roadmap 2024 for an Aerial Industrial Revolution compiled by the public-private council for establishing an environment for unmanned aircraft, measures are being advanced. These aim to transform industry, the economy and society through the optimisation and improvement of business using unmanned aircraft (drones) across various sectors, involving the phased expansion of operational areas starting from depopulated regions and the promotion of utilisation and dissemination tailored to diverse purposes and flight patterns. For instance, in the logistics sector, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) published the [Guidelines Regarding the Delivery of Cargo via Drone Ver.0.4](#) (available in Japanese only) in March 2023 and, in September 2024, the National New Smart Logistics Promotion Council formulated and published the [Guidelines for Drone Delivery Terms and Conditions Ver. 1.0](#) (available in Japanese only). Furthermore,

within the entertainment sector, unmanned aircraft (drones) shows are increasingly being staged at event venues such as the Osaka Expo 2025 and firework displays. Consequently, the MLIT published the second edition of the [Guidelines for the Safe Operation of Multiple Unmanned Aircraft Systems](#) (available in Japanese only) in June 2026. In the agricultural sector, the use of drones to spray pesticides is expanding rapidly.

From 2025 to 2026, the expansion of drone-based businesses continued to prioritise logistics and transportation in sparsely populated areas. Demonstration projects and new market entrants increased in mountainous regions and on remote islands. This is because strict restrictions on drone flights are in place in urban areas, whereas such restrictions are either non-existent or minimal in mountainous regions and on remote islands. Furthermore, it is difficult to secure truck drivers in depopulated areas, and the number of households to which packages are delivered is decreasing, making transportation costs uneconomical. Consequently, even when factoring in the probability of drones crashing and losing both the drone and its cargo if they ship packages often enough, drones remain a relatively inexpensive means of transportation. Therefore, the expansion of drone-based transportation assumes that drones will inevitably crash. This form of transportation is directly linked to essential supplies such as food and medicine for elderly people.

Similarly, the effective use of drones during disasters is increasingly recognised. Organisations wishing to conduct disaster relief operations using drones have joined the Japan UAS Industry Development Association (JUIDA). In December 2024, JUIDA-D³, a civilian drone disaster response organisation, was established. As earthquakes and typhoons occur almost every year in Japan, this initiative is gradually being refined. Following the Kumamoto earthquake on 28 July 2026, JUIDA-D³ began operations the following day after receiving a request for assistance from the Ground Self-Defence Force. Flights were conducted to search for survivors, particularly at a shopping centre where an explosion had occurred.

Furthermore, although the proportion of drones manufactured domestically remains extremely low, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) announced the [Policy Guidelines for Ensuring a Stable Supply of Unmanned Aircraft](#) (available in Japanese only) in March 2026, with the aim of breaking away from a manufacturing system that relies on specific countries (particularly China) for production. This move is clearly driven by economic security concerns and aligns with the policies of the current Prime Minister Takaichi. Growing concerns about the appropriateness of using drones that could be controlled by China for emergency disaster response and critical infrastructure maintenance, as well as the feasibility of ensuring a stable supply, have led to this shift in policy. These concerns extend to not only the drone airframes themselves, but also the supply chain, including batteries, motors and controllers, which currently rely on foreign sources. Consequently, METI has decided to strengthen government involvement in drones and their supply chains, including gathering and verifying information on strengthening domestic production capacity, preventing the transfer of core technologies and managing business partners, while also selecting a fund to provide support.

Law stated - 14 July 2026