

FAA reauthorization allows for UAVs to help monitor oil and gas facilities

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The Senate has approved an amendment to streamline the permitting process for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The amendment, which was sponsored by Sens. James Inhofe (R-OK) and Cory Booker (D-NJ), also contained a provision that would allow oil and gas operators to use UAVs, or drones, to inspect and respond to facilities, refineries, and pipelines.

The amendment was included as a part of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill (H.R. 636), which passed the Senate on April 19. Industry groups such as the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and the American Petroleum Institute (API) have praised the provision.

Guidance regarding the proper use of drones has been a lengthy process for FAA, which just released its draft rules for integrating UAVs into the National Airspace System last year. Furthermore, Sen. Inhofe had previously introduced legislation to allow energy companies to use UAVs for inspection and maintenance of facilities. However, his bill was stalled in the Senate.

The FAA reauthorization bill, along with the UAV amendment, will now go back to the House where it will be conferenced before a consensus version can be sent to the President and signed into law.

Sources: Congress.gov, E&E News, Federal Aviation Administration
