

Editorial: Fix the holes in Oregon's drone law

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Rep. John Huffman, R-The Dalles, led the way in 2013 with a bill to protect Oregonians from excessive snooping by government drones. In 2016, he wants the Legislature to address concerns raised about recreational drones. And it should.

Drones flying near wildfires in Oregon have caused fire retardant drops to be aborted. Pilots have reported hundreds of incidents across the country in which they worried that drones could hit an aircraft.

There is already an Oregon statute that prohibits operating an aircraft — including an unmanned aircraft — in a careless or reckless manner. More is needed.

Huffman's 2013 law focused primarily on law enforcement. It requires police to get a warrant before using a drone to monitor someone. There are exceptions for imminent threats. That's a reasonable requirement. There are also penalties set for using a drone as a weapon.

But the law didn't cover hobby or recreational drones at all. That should be fixed.

The bill won't be introduced until the Legislature is in session early next year. The priorities are to extend the prohibition on weaponization to any drone and to create penalties for flying near sensitive no-fly areas and interfering with manned aircraft. There will also likely be language to prohibit flying near chemical plants, dams, prisons and energy facilities.

As The Bulletin's Taylor Anderson reported recently, the ACLU of Oregon is also concerned about loopholes. The worry is that law enforcement may use drone information gathered from other state agencies that are not required to follow warrant restrictions. Rules for information sharing may need to be spelled out in the law.

Huffman told us he does not intend to hinder Oregon's growing drone industry. But rules are needed to ensure privacy and that drones are used safely.

For now, if you have a drone and want to know some do's and don'ts, a good place to start is knowbeforeyoufly.org.