



Episode 567: FAA Wants to Regulate Your Flying Toys; Show Listener Helps Overturn Crazy Law

Guest: Dave Thacker

WOODS: Well, you have been very active over the past few weeks, and it looks like you, as a matter of fact, have had some success with regard to a particularly obnoxious law in Ohio. It was just in one town. Tell me where, and what did they actually do right on the eve of Christmas, practically.

THACKER: Well, right on the eve of Christmas, the town of Celina, Ohio outlawed all flying toys above three ounces. This was a knee jerk reaction to them fearing, I guess, the sky being full of photography drones and Predator strike drones and who knows what else they were thinking. But really these are model aircraft. These are toys. These are engineers' and geeks' toys. Children, long before they become a pilot or an engineer or an astronaut, they involve themselves in technical hobbies like model airplanes, and I am a lifelong lover of all things aviation and a participant in the model airplane hobby myself, and I was completely incensed when I heard about this law.

WOODS: Well, this three ounce thing. Anything above a paper airplane is going to be above three ounces.

THACKER: I've seen some paper airplanes over three ounces.

WOODS: So even that. So this was essentially shutting the whole thing down. Had there been any public debate about this? Did you know this was coming?

THACKER: I didn't hear about it until the law was actually put in place.

WOODS: And you're a hobby shop owner yourself.

THACKER: And I'm a hobby shop owner myself, yes. And I also consider myself a small time liberty activist, and when I heard about this, it was — how can they on the eve of Christmas ban technology toys in a town? And I don't want that coming to my town in Dayton, Ohio. I don't want it coming to Montgomery County. I don't want it coming to Montgomery, Alabama; Phoenix, Arizona; or any place else. We are all peaceful participants in a technical hobby, and a lot of us go on to be engineers and pilots and serve in other ways in the sciences. This was unacceptable that we would ban technology in 2015.

WOODS: All right, now what about — let's try and think of it from their point of view for a minute. Let's assume these are simply disinterested public servants who have no axe to grind. They just want what's best for the public, and they want to keep everybody safe. Why is that unreasonable? Isn't it at least conceivable to think — I'm just trying to think from their point of view. Isn't it conceivable to imagine that there could be all kinds of flying devices out there?

THACKER: Well, the thing that our hobby has been criticized for is its potential to be a violation of privacy. There are many drones you can buy that have cameras on them, and you can fly them around and take pictures, and mostly these are very small cameras, they don't have long zoom lenses, they're not really capable of doing that kind of photography really very easily. If we go to Wal-Mart, we can buy, \$22, \$39, we can buy a telescope with 100x zoom. I had a telescope when I was kid, and I was too young to have one, and I looked at the neighborhood with that telescope. Of course I did; I was a kid.

But the kinds of cameras that are on photography drones are really, the lenses are such that they're made for a really wide-angle view. You can get beautiful vistas. You'll see a lot of photography of sunsets and canyons and large nature photography and stuff like that, and a lot of the people that are in the drone world are really hobby photographers that kind of came into the model airplane or the radio controlled aircraft hobby from the side, because it's like the most phenomenal tripod in the world. I mean, wow, I can get my camera right in front of the waterfall if I want, and these are things that could have never been done before.

And it's expanding, not just in photography, but it's expanding the whole world of services that are available to people. I've seen videos of life jackets being delivered to a kid on a rock in the middle of a raging river with a drone, and the fireman is a hobby photographer who just thought of in the moment that he could use his drone to make it safer to rescue this young boy. And there are many, many uses like that for this technology.

WOODS: Yeah, let's talk more about this, because I know nothing about this technology at all. I did an episode on drones some time ago, but even then, I just don't know anything about it. I trust people like you who know the stuff to tell me about it. You sent me a whole bunch of information. In fact, I'm going to link to as much of it as I possibly can on today's show notes page, which is TomWoods.com/567. First about this law and the repeal of the law, but also what you're calling positive uses for drones, things that really anybody in his right mind would cheer. But first, the law got repealed. Was that simply because there was an outcry against it?

THACKER: Oh yeah, there was an outcry. It's not popular. You don't want to be a politician who's on the news in a negative light, and I was painting, you know, the realistic picture of this, of the kids that aren't going to get to participate in these hobbies because of this draconian law. And I don't think we need to be banning technologies. It reminds me of book-burning attitude almost, and a lot of that comes from the fact that the councilmen in this city hadn't been exposed to it. They just

were seeing what they were seeing on the news, and that is kind of their entire image of it.

And when you look at some of the things we see on the news, we had the drone that crashed on the White House lawn: government employee. We had the drone that crashed at the U.S. Open tennis match, which was also a government employee. And in all fairness, there have been some people that weren't government employees that did things that they shouldn't be doing or doing photography in places they shouldn't.

In our hobby we have a national organization called the Academy of Model Aeronautics, and our first and most fundamental rule is we do not fly over people. Except for in very controlled circumstances, you do not fly over people. And that's because you don't want to have an accident, or if you have an accident, you don't want to hurt anybody. And this is a very fundamental thing, and when any of us in this hobby who are members of this organization, which is about 175,000 strong, when we encounter people with toy helicopters and multirotors – if they have multiple props, they're called a multirotor – we explain them don't interfere with aircraft, stay away from power lines, don't fly over people. Those are the three most important, basic safety, fundamental rules. What we need is education, not draconian legislation from every little town and borough and the FAA.

WOODS: All right, yeah, let's talk about the FAA. I have an article up here right here on my screen, and it's, let's see, "FAA Announces Drone Registration Rules."

THACKER: Yes.

WOODS: Tell us about that.

THACKER: Well, in the 2012 Budget Act, our president and our Congress passed a law that said the FAA was to keep their hands off of recreational model aviation. So what they've done, because they want to obviously spread their umbrella of control and grow their agency as large as possible –

WOODS: No, they don't want to do that; they just want to help the public.

THACKER: They're selfless, social justice warriors, I know, yes, of course. But they redefined what a model was or what a model airplane was. They said it's an airplane, therefore it's a UAS; it's something that we do have purview over, even though in the law it says specifically that they do not have purview over it. So they're making legislation anyways and encroaching into our private lives.

WOODS: Well, can you imagine there being any role whatsoever for a regulatory body when it comes to things like this that will be flying around in the air? Do you think that this is an entirely made up concern? Is there any merit to it whatsoever but you just think it should be handled in a different way? What's your overall take on this?

THACKER: Well, my overall take on it is that when we look at the statistics, there's been more collisions between airplanes and turtles than there have between airplanes and toy drones.

WOODS: Yeah, I've been looking at that. Apparently just about 200. Now, where are these turtles that they're getting hit by planes?

THACKER: Well, when I saw that statistic and I looked into that, I was amazed, but you know, they run into deer. You know, deer cross the runway like they cross the road in front of your car.

WOODS: Oh sure, yeah.

THACKER: Yeah, so there's lots of collisions with wildlife and unexpected things that are purely accidents, but you cannot fine the deer, you can't tax the turtle, you can't charge him a registration fee. But you can do that to human beings.

WOODS: All right, let's take a look here. I've got so much stuff I want to ask you about. What's the deal with this Airline Pilots Association? They apparently are colluding here with the FAA?

THACKER: Yeah, it looks like the Airline Pilots Association has been working against recreational modeling to try to make it more difficult to be in the airspace. Apparently there's a document there that demonstrates that they are looking to force training and certification of model airplane pilots. And you know, the model airplane world and the flying toy world has existed longer than full scale aviation has existed. And within our world, we have instructors and pilots that teach other pilots. When people come into my shop, I help them. I've taken them out in front of my shop and given them flying lessons before. It's a community of people that love aviation and they all help each other and teach each other how to be safe and to fly properly. We don't want to tear up our equipment, obviously.

WOODS: All right, I'm looking at a couple of items here that you sent. One of them is "FAA Shuts Down Every Drone (Model Aircraft) Club Within 30 Miles of Washington, DC." Then I've got "FAA Says You Can't Post Drone Videos on YouTube," and then apparently the FAA doesn't want you operating anywhere within five miles of an airport. Let's unpack some of those.

THACKER: Okay, so the five-mile rule applies to airports with a control tower. If it's, you know, the small country airport without a control tower, it's three miles. And their fines are between \$11 and \$27,000. So if four and a half miles away from an airport, you're hovering your drone in front of a waterfall to take a picture or you're flying one inch off the ground under the bowels of a pine tree, you're obviously interfering with every airbus and 707 that's in the sky. You're a safety hazard, and we need to do something about you. And this is — they are seeking to extend their power in a way that destroys people's lives. I mean, for a lot of people, that is the equity in a car or the equity in their home. And none of us want to interfere with full scale aircraft, and

if you are interfering, any listeners, with full scale aircraft, as far as I'm concerned they can go after you full bore, because you are not casting our hobby in a good light. But that is not what we do. We do everything in the world to try to avoid full scale aviation. A model never has the right of way over a full scale aircraft. There are lives involved.

And the thing in Washington that's really disturbing is they've pushed it out 30 miles. There's been 36 flying sites. Now, these are places that people have rented, sometimes it's areas that have been approved for use in city parks, it's sometimes at the edge of a farmer's field, and they're clubs of people, and they establish that area because it's a safe place to fly. There are no obstacles; they're not overflying homes, etc., etc. But the government disparages us by saying, well, that's a national safety risk that we would have these model airplane clubs, people playing with toy airplanes within 30 miles of Washington, DC. Now, you could launch a model airplane from anywhere in Washington, DC, a drone out of the back of a pickup truck. I mean, anyone's that going to commit a crime is not going to go to a flying site where there's a lot of people to witness it. It's not going to happen that way. It's a ridiculous requirement, and a lot of people are being hurt by it.

WOODS: I want to ask you about this new legislation. I guess this is just from a piece from, well, by the time this airs, a couple of weeks ago in Tennessee. New Tennessee legislation involving firearms or explosives attached to drones. I want to ask you about what that's all about, but let's pause for this message just for a moment.

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All right, so this is a law that's being proposed to outlaw attaching firearms or explosives to drones. Now, I don't know any — I'm just trying to play devil's advocate here. I can't think of any good reason somebody would have for attaching a firearm to a drone, so how is this, seriously speaking, an imposition on your liberty?

THACKER: Okay, I have never met a model airplane person, a drone person, anybody that wants to attach firearms to their model. That is not a safe way to handle a firearm. You don't want to shoot yourself. And I have flown a toy helicopter into myself before. Accidents can happen, so that would be like the last place in the world I would ever want to see a firearm.

But that being said, if you read the law, they are reserving for the police the right to do that. So there's a legislator in Tennessee who has visions of drones chasing down people and firing guns at them, apparently, and I think it's a despicable, disgusting characterization of our hobby that anyone would even suggest that it would be okay for the police to put firearms and weapons and explosives on a radio controlled craft.

WOODS: I'm noting here, by the way — I didn't know any of this stuff. You have some interesting items about uses for drones that, again, because of my lack of knowledge of it, I just wasn't aware of. So you give as an example a hobby photographer and modeler, and this is a case where you have a first responder who uses his recreational

drone to help a swift water rescue team deliver a life jacket to a young boy. That's a YouTube video. Then the use of such technology to help first responders find people in a Texas river flood. It was used to deliver rescue line. And so on down the line.

This is very interesting technology, and it's technology that seems to have quite a few potential uses. I mean, these are extraordinary cases. But then of course we've heard — I mean, we all probably saw that almost surreal video last year or the year before of an Amazon drone. You know, you pack up a little package, and the drone flies through the air and delivers you a package. Are there any potential downsides to the technology? Or is it a matter of it's upsides in the hands of the private sector but potential downsides in the government's hands? What are your thoughts there?

THACKER: Well, I think the private sector is going to resolve all of these problems. Like for instance, sports photography, we've seen the cameras that are suspended by cables over a football game. A drone is never going to be competitive filming sports in a stadium where they can set up a rig like that, so I don't think we're going to see drones used in stadiums or that there's ever going to be economic or financial reason to do that. But the world is wide open. There's lots of big dreams right now, and we're going to eventually boil this down to all the places where it really does make sense and it's practical.

One of the really beautiful things that they can do is with infrared spectrometry or with infrared cameras, they can look at crops and see where the crop is lacking in chlorophyll. And so the farmer knows where he needs to put the fertilizers. And this means we're going to be putting less chemicals into our environment. And there's many, many other things out there that's going on with drones.

For instance, I tried to look it up before the show and couldn't find the information, but there's a number of people that die every year inspecting the cables and furls on high television towers. These have to be inspected periodically. The tower can fall and injure people, take out homes, so there's an inspection regimen for that. Well, this can be done with a drone, and a man doesn't have to climb the tower. We don't have to worry about him being struck by lightning or falling off. So there's just many things like that. Pipeline inspection. Thousands of miles of pipeline need to be inspected periodically to make sure they're not spilling oil all over the ground.

And one of the big problems is this technology is basically free and open in all countries except the United States, and the FAA has been holding us back and holding us back and holding us back until the point where China has 90% of the market now. That's where the producers of all these drones are, that for years we haven't been allowed to do anything. They've prevented people from doing pipeline inspections and antenna inspections and various things in the past that were clearly safer for humans to do, and so America has slipped behind the power curve in applying this technology.

WOODS: Tell me about the Academy of Model Aircraft at ModelAircraft.org. What's that all about?

THACKER: Well, that's our national organization. They lobby to protect our flying rights. They provide us insurance, so if there's a model airplane club that ever wants to use your field, it comes with, I believe, a couple million dollars worth of insurance to protect the property owner. We've been around for 80 years, since 1936, and we have an excellent safety record. Now, I am not a representative of the AMA. I'm just a lifelong member of the AMA. So I'm not speaking for them specifically. I'm speaking for myself as a modeler and as a hobby shop owner and just as an aviation enthusiast. I just see this as a poison for our hobby that the FAA is going to be putting themselves in a position to rob us of all of our assets.

WOODS: All right, that's an astonishing final sentence there about people potentially losing everything, but yet at the same time we hear bizarre stories all the time of people running afoul of the authorities over this or that. But give me an example of how something like that could happen.

THACKER: Well, what concerns me is we have contests; in Muncie we have a national contest, and there's many different vectors in this hobby, different interests. There are people who fly free-fly, people who fly sailplanes, pattern, all different kinds of disciplines. And it's not an unheard of thing for a model in the zeal of competition to be carried away in a thermal and become lost. Now, 20 years ago if that model had been found in the municipal livery at the police station somewhere, you would have gotten a phone call and said, Mr. Woods, we think we have something that belongs to you; can you come pick it up? And you would've been very happy; your model airplane's been found; you can go back to competition with it.

Today, it might be a national incident. You might be fined anywhere from \$11 to \$27,000, because this model got off the field over an innocent thing. And you know, we're just putting ourselves in a position where we're going to be — you know, people can enhance their resumes by destroying lives here, and this is what really concerns me.

WOODS: Tell me about, if people want to find out more about what you're doing, you've got quite a few places online. I'm going to link to all of them at TomWoods.com/567. So you've got a YouTube channel. You've got some YouTube material that is liberty related; you have a YouTube channel that has a home workshop style to it. You have your model aviation — I mean, you have a ton of stuff. You have a blog. You have your business site. Give us the website, and give us your blog.

THACKER: Okay, my website is RadicalRC.com, and I mostly supply electronics, adhesives, all the little various bits and pieces. We manufacture a lot of laser cut kits and different things for the model aircraft hobby in general. I'm not a drone shop specifically. I have a YouTube channel by that same name, Radical RC, in the links where I put up shop videos occasionally. My more serious YouTube channel is called Crafted. And I'm a maker; I love making and designing and engineering things, and so I just show my home workshop projects, which are usually not model aviation related. I've been wanting to have a channel where I can put stronger liberty content. I have

some liberty and philosophy content on the Crafted channel, but I just opened a new channel, I.Liberty, for that purpose, and I plan on adding videos to that regularly.

WOODS: All right, so you are producing a lot of stuff. You've got a lot of outlets. You're doing just what people should do, which is, not only are you promoting our ideas, but you're finding your own personal niche, because you have this tremendous background and knowledge in your own area, and you convey the information via that particular area. And more and more people should do that. We don't necessarily need everybody in the world to write essays on inflation. We need you to take what you're an expert at and — well, first of all, it's great to teach what you're an expert at, but if you can also have some kind of liberty message attached to it, that's great, because that's how we reach people, because not everybody is Googling around for articles on inflation, but they might be stumbling upon what you're working on and what you're writing. It reminds me of Eric Peters, whom I have on the show regularly, and he does the same for automobiles, and he knows a lot about automobiles, and as usual, the government's involved in everything, so he can talk to you about automobiles and the government. Very, very, very helpful and important to know, and it's great to know that we're everywhere. There's one of us everywhere. No matter what the field is, there's a liberty person out there doing good work. I saw video clips of you in local media speaking out against that crazy law. So there is no question — I mean, you were like the public face against this thing. You played a role in getting this stupid thing overturned. I mean, you must be very pleased about that.

THACKER: Oh yeah, I'm very pleased about it. We're still watching them, because they're still trying to get another law through, and we want to make sure that it's good. But the crowning victory here is that the city has come completely full circle, and now they're going to establish a park. Which, if you don't want people skateboarding all over your community, put in a skate park. If they don't want problems — if they think there is a problem, if they don't want people flying toy helicopters all over the city, put in a park for that. The kids will be drawn to it. It'll become a magnet. And you can encourage people to use it. I'm fine with the city encouraging people to use a designated area; I just don't want to see fines and, you know, negative interactions between police officers and kids. We have too many tragedies involving innocent police officers being killed or injured by nutcases. We don't need police officers having ticky-tacky interactions with kids over playing with their toy in the park.

WOODS: Yeah, I mean, obviously in general when society becomes more — there's more and more legislation gets passed and there are more and more regulations, there's more and more opportunities for the public to come into contact with law enforcement, when these people are just ordinary, regular people not looking to cause any trouble. So more and more people are at risk of getting into trouble when there are more things to get into trouble about.

THACKER: Right.

WOODS: So it seems to me that once they solve the murder problem, then maybe they might think about this somewhere 500 years down the road. But it does seem to me to be misplaced resources. But of course that's typical. How can they know where their resources best belong? It's Austrian economics all over again. Well, Dave, I appreciate your time. I hope people will check out RadicalRC.com, your business site, and RadicalRC.com/blog, where they can read what you're writing. But I'm going to put all that stuff, plus your YouTube material, put all of it up at TomWoods.com/567. Well, congratulations on helping to smack down that law that made national news. I mean, people were all very interested in what was happening there, and by the time I was able to get you on, you were so effective that you already got the thing repealed.

THACKER: Yes.

WOODS: Yeah, congratulations to you, and thank you so much for your time.

THACKER: Thank you.