

Buzz the Tower

By Reg P. Wydeven

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A few weeks ago I wrote about how I would have totally benefited from having an unmanned drone so I could have spied on my now-wife when she used to lay out in high school to work on her tan. Because I sunburn easily, I still might consider buying a drone so I could admire her working in the garden while I watch the NCAA tournament.

To avoid the sun's harmful rays, I would probably purchase the drone online. If I bought it from Amazon.com, my drone just might be delivered to me by – get this – a drone.

The Federal Aviation Administration has recently issued Amazon a certificate to experiment with unmanned aircraft for research, development and crew training. Last July the online retailer asked the FAA for permission to test using drones for delivering their multitude of packages.

Under the terms of the certificate, the drones can only be flown at 400 feet or less during daylight hours. In addition, the drone operator must have a private pilot's certificate and current medical certification. Finally, the drone must always be in sight of the pilot.

As part of the certification, the FAA is also requiring Amazon to provide monthly data to the agency regarding their experimentation. The FAA is asking for the number of flights Amazon conducts, the pilot's duty time of each flight, unusual malfunctions involving hardware or software and other information.

I love ordering stuff from Amazon. And to think the novelization of 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' could be delivered to me by a remote controlled mini-helicopter? That would be completely awesome.

In addition to convenience, another reason I love Amazon is because of their terrific prices. Well, I'm glad to know that the company is constantly looking for ways to keep their prices so competitive.

One such method is by utilizing security checks at their warehouses to ensure employees are not stealing products as they leave after a shift. Preventing theft helps keep prices low. So does not paying these employees for the time spent going through the security clearances.

Jesse Busk and Laurie Castro were two warehouse employees who started a class action lawsuit against their employer, Integrity Staffing Solutions, which provides workers for Amazon warehouses across the country. The employees claimed that because the security clearances were required to keep their jobs, they should be paid for the time they spend waiting to go through them.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit ruled in favor of the workers, so Integrity appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court unanimously reversed the decision, because as Justice Clarence Thomas explained, federal law requires that workers be paid for activities before and after their shifts only when the activities are "integral and indispensable" to the job they are hired to perform.

Thomas wrote that Integrity "did not employ its workers to undergo security screenings, but to retrieve products from warehouse shelves and package those products for shipment to Amazon customers." Because of the huge business of online retailers, experts believed a decision in favor of the workers would have resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in additional compensation. And increased prices.

I wonder if the warehouse employees could use a drone to fly themselves over the security checks.

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