



A drone is prepared for launch during a trial flight inspecting Transpower's transmission lines in the Rimutaka Ranges near Wellington.

Rules clip drone wings

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Drone users are learning that the sky isn't the limit thanks to local and central government regulations.

The requirements have pushed up the cost of jobs that Jared Waddams of Helicam Pro carries out for clients.

He said most of these regulations are driven by councils trying to cover themselves against any occupational health and safety liability.

"A lot of my time is spent tracking down the correct people to talk to at councils and it adds to costs," Waddams said.

Some of his work included filming progress on highway construction for roading firms, and taking photographs for real estate and tourist firms.

Local authorities occasionally make footage of disaster areas available publicly. Drones have been used recently around Kaikoura to speed up assessment

of slips and earthquake-damaged roads and railways.

Waddams said that not only was legislation under review but the Christchurch City Council would be reconsidering some of its rules this year.

New opportunities from the technology are emerging for corporate lawyers such as Maria Pozza, a drone enthusiast.

She recently offered her advice on aviation, space and technology law at a meeting of the Canterbury Tech Cluster where she outlined the safeguards operators could put in place.

Privacy was a problematic area because drone cameras could not differentiate between passers-by and legitimate subjects such as crops.

Good documentation when providing drone services was imperative so everyone understood the regulations, Pozza said.

For example, rules varied between local authorities.

The Airshare website set up by industry groups and the Civil Avi-

ation Authority outlines the rules that apply under legislation passed in 2015 including drones remaining within line of an operator's sight, and height restrictions that apply under either 101 or 102 registration.

One of those attending Pozza's presentation was Fred Samandari who joined the University of Canterbury in 2010 as director of the Wireless Research Centre.

His researchers work with the adjacent Spatial Engineering Research Centre, where he is also director, and where drone technology is at the forefront of much of the work under way in collaboration with industry.

Projects include radio tracking of wildlife over long distances and developing sensors to measure ice thickness in Antarctica.

Another project, sponsored by Crown Research Institute Scion, involves in forestry surveys of tree lines to plan harvest and planting. Thermal mapping of forest fire hotspots is another area of research.