

# Academy of Model Aeronautics

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Air & Space Magazine  
Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I read with interest the article in the July 2011 issue of *Air & Space Smithsonian* entitled “Pilot Cam,” and on behalf of the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) and its 140,000 members I must take issue with the article’s misrepresentation of model aviation and the ill-considered reporting in regards to aviation safety.

The Academy of Model Aeronautics exists as the national body for aeromodeling operations and has established its National Model Aircraft Safety Code as a guide to the safe conduct of model aircraft activities. AMA’s safety code encompasses the safety principles presented in FAA’s Advisory Circular on “Model Aircraft Operating Standards” (AC 91-57) and has served as the standard for model aviation safety for 75 years.

Through AMA’s program of voluntary compliance, common sense, and a responsible approach to model aircraft operations, the aeromodeling community has achieved a superior safety record, one that exceeds that of any other form of aviation.

Although AMA recognizes the technological ingenuity and creativity of the First Person Video (FPV) endeavor, AMA does not condone the manner in which your article suggests this flight activity be conducted and the threat it poses to the public. To state that the FPV pilot could or should fly “anywhere he wants” as suggested by your writer, Mark Betancourt, is irresponsible and dangerous.

In the words of one of our members who is himself a captain for a commercial air carrier, “I, for one, don’t relish the idea of ingesting an I-phone (FPV aircraft) and destroying an engine while at altitude. ... just another way of saying just how unbelievably selfish and unconcerned for public safety these clowns are.”

The AMA does not consider the FPV operations as reported in your article and touted by Raphael Pirker to be an aeromodeling activity. It is more akin to a commercial Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) as defined by the FAA, and is likely in violation of FAA’s clarification of AC 91-57 issued by Nicholas Sabatini in the Federal Register on February 6, 2007.

Mr. Pirker’s adrenaline rush achieved by flying his UAS “miles out of his reach” certainly exhibits his mindset and defies his contention that “FPV fliers have their own strict code of safety ... like no flights in airspace that can’t be monitored by a spotter.”

Mr. Pirker’s stunt over Liberty Island and the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges exemplifies his indifference for public safety and nearly cost the aeromodeling community the privilege of flying and enjoying the hobby within the boroughs of New York City.

The fact that he openly admits he violates the flight restrictions of Austria, his home country, and chooses to exploit the National Airspace System (NAS) of the United States as well as the airspace of other countries clearly illustrates his total disregard for aviation safety, sovereignty, and regulatory compliance.

Although the current regulatory stance regarding FPV operations is admittedly ambiguous, your writer seemingly endorsed this activity without questioning the risk it poses to the aviation community and public safety. Mr. Betancourt went so far as to point out the ease of entry into the FPV pursuit, identified the necessary components, offered tips on assembly, and directed the reader to sources for the equipment. Never once did he mention the safety factors that need to be considered or direct the reader to available resources for understanding the regulatory issues and learning to fly responsibly.

Founded in 1936, the Academy of Model Aeronautics is a not-for-profit membership organization whose primary mission is to promote the development of model aviation as a recognized hobby and family-oriented recreational activity that is fun and educational. Academy of Model Aeronautics members have included numerous pioneers and prominent individuals in aviation and the aerospace industry including: Neil A. Armstrong, NASA Astronaut; Robert "Hoot" Gibson, Captain U.S. Navy and Commander NASA Space Shuttle; and Burt Rutan, aerospace engineer, to name a view.

On behalf of the Academy I would like to extend an offer to *Air & Space/Smithsonian* magazine to assist in framing this and related stories in the proper perspective. We are quite willing to supply material regarding the safety considerations for FPV flight, the growth, history, and technological advancements in model aviation, the diversity of the hobby, as well as information on the regulatory challenges facing the aeromodeling community.

AMA's National Model Aviation Safety Code and its guidance for FPV operations (AMA Document #550) are available to view in detail on our website at [www.modelaircraft.org](http://www.modelaircraft.org).

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Academy of Model Aeronautics