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Xcel Energy and FAA launch first-of-its-kind safety partnership

Protecting the airspace while inspecting critical infrastructure

Minneapolis Feb. 15, 2017– Xcel Energy announced today a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Federal Aviation Administration to research the safe operation of drone technology to inspect critical infrastructure. The agreement involves using unmanned aircraft systems to inspect more than 20,000 miles of Xcel Energy transmission lines in 10 states. The data collected from diverse climates, conditions and geographies will be used by the federal agency to secure the nation’s airspace now and in the future.

“We’re proud to partner with the FAA to explore ways unmanned aircraft systems can enhance public safety while protecting the national grid and gas pipelines,” said Kent Larson, Xcel Energy’s executive vice president and group president of operations. “Drone technology is already giving us better inspection data to efficiently and effectively monitor our systems, ensuring employee safety and improving reliability to better serve customers.”

Among the goals of the “Partnership for Safety Plan,” is to shape future FAA policies for safe and routine beyond visual-line-of-sight operations to inspect the electrical grid. In 2017, Xcel Energy plans at least one beyond visual-line-of-sight mission using drone technology along transmission lines in a rural area. The FAA and Xcel Energy will plan and develop safety measures and evaluate outcomes.

Xcel Energy has previously worked with the FAA to advance UAS guidelines for the energy sector. During the past three years, Xcel Energy has conducted more than a dozen outdoor missions using drone technology including a beyond visual-line-of-sight flight in 2016.

Last year, Xcel Energy began a year-long research project in partnership with the state of North Dakota, the University of North Dakota and other partners to use drone technology to assess damage after severe weather events. The company is sharing its operational and safety data with the FAA and the Edison Electric Institute, an association that represents all U.S. investor-owned electric companies. Learn more about Xcel Energy’s work [here](#).

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