



# The Process & Perks of a Standing SFOC With ANTOINE LÉGER



When Moment Factory and AMPme organized the light show on the Jacques Cartier bridge for Montreal's 375th anniversary, commercial drone pilot Antoine Léger was allowed to film it all. "I felt very privileged to be part of the team by filming and lending out very beautiful images," says Léger, who was involved from the very beginning. This once in a lifetime opportunity came as a result of his standing specialized flight operations certification. Ledger was able to practice and perfect his flight plans for the big day without a need to apply for a lengthy flight approval each time. There are many misconceptions about what a standing specialized flight operations certification is and who qualifies for it. The confusion is understandable, as recreational SFOCs were implemented only a couple of months ago. As a result, both old and new drone pilots unknowingly limit themselves.

When Léger began flying in 2010, He admits drones then were so new, nobody was aware of the existing rules. Drone rules were considered guidelines or thoughtful suggestions without penalties. Léger remembers his career started when he first came across a drone shot on the Internet. It was an aerial picture of the Mont-Royal Cross. Léger was so impressed by the proximity of the camera, that he contacted the photographer, Simon with a list of questions. "I said, 'how did you make that picture? I've been flying helicopters since 1996 -- how did you pull that off?'" reminisces Léger, he was eager to learn and participate. He partnered with Simon, and together they began flying an engine dragonfly drone equipped with a Canon camera. Today, such an overnight venture is a lengthy process. "[Back then] it was a free-for-all; you could fly drones wherever you wanted to," says léger.

Prior to the new regulations, recreational drones that weighed more than 35 kg (77 lbs) were not required to apply for a SFOC. Now all drones 250g (1.05 lbs) are required to abide by Canadian Aviation regulations and apply for a SFOC. These certifications dictate how and where you may fly a drone; non-compliance fines run as high as \$3,000! Drone pilots are required to apply for a SFOC before every flight, explaining how, when and where they will use the UAV and detailing how they will manage safety risks. It can take up to 20 business days for approval. Many people come to Léger for advice; he earned his standing SFOC in 2014 after completing 12 SFOC flights - renewable every year. This spring he was approved to fly Class C Airspace. He finds Transport Canada to be very severe with newcomers. "They treat everybody equally. If you apply for a SFOC and your application is well filled and not missing anything, you will get an SFOC," he adds. "Maybe the first dozen of them will be specific SFOCs to work on specific GPS coordinates." The application is the same for everyone - farmers, media companies, construction, police, and recreational drone users. Everyone. According to Léger, there are two dozen pilots with Standing SFOCs in Quebec ready to fly at a minute's notice.

Despite the lengthy process, earning a standing SFOC is the ultimate goal. "Pilots have to go through the IP 6.23 - 001," says Léger. "It's the document Transport Canada will use to verify and review your application...It's 200 pages long!" Léger cites the Canadian Drone Academy as a good resource for pilots daunted by the process. "Drone laws impede the progress of this new technology," says Nick Iversen, founder of the Canadian Drone Academy. "They don't allow the people who are driving the progress to fly as they have been safely doing for many, many years." It's Iversen's mission to get as many pilots up in the air as he can.

"We offer a course where you'll learn everything you need about applying for SFOCs and becoming a full-time pilot," says Iversen, "the course is \$499.99 and put together by all of our best pilots, including Antoine [Léger]." Students are able to directly learn from Léger, as he is a teacher at the Canadian Drone Academy. The course materials are available on the Canadian Drone Academy's e-learning platform. On the platform, teachers and students can speak face-to-face with live video chatting. Visual learning and engagement are encouraged through screen sharing, live whiteboard sketching tools, live webinars and group chatting. The Canadian Drone Academy urges pilots to keep track of their SFOC flights, as they count towards a standing SFOC application or drone flight freedom.

