

Droning on about the future



By [Mike Strobel](#), *Toronto Sun*

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In this photo taken June 11, 2015, a hexacopter drone is flown during a demonstration in Cordova, Md. (AP PHOTO)

Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion says global warming is the world's greatest threat, not Islamic terrorism.

But if I'm a polar bear, I'm more worried about a drone landing on my head.

The Drone Age is upon us. Duck and cover, kids.

Sure thing, boss. And your Rogers cable works perfectly, your computer is always lightning fast, your iPhone never runs out of juice ...

Did you read our [Jenny Yuen's story](#) Friday on a Toronto firm developing a fleet of 2,000 delivery drones? Drone Delivery Canada says its little buzzers will do 100 km/h and stay airborne for half an hour.

They will bring you pizza or drop off parcels as big as 15-pounds, hopefully not on your cat.

If you need really speedy delivery, they will haul a defibrillator or other emergency products, though the paramedic will still have to drive. The Toronto fleet is supposed to launch in January 2018.

But commercial drones are busting out all over. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is issuing some 50 new licences a week to companies wanting to fly them. Transport Canada gave out 1,672 commercial drone permits last year.

So far, these are mostly for aerial photos for mining companies, wildlife surveys, developers, farmers and the like. But the possibilities are limitless, including mail delivery.

Ski resorts will soon offer drones to take “selfies” of you zooming down their slopes.

Amazon is developing Prime Air for drone deliveries and is preaching “superhighways” with separate “lanes” for commercial and hobby craft.

Soon, our skies will be dark with drones.

This must wait until anti-collision technology is perfected, so drones can avoid each other, buildings, trees, kites, birds, balloons, planes, Santa Claus, the CN Tower and tall people.

But Amazon, Google and NASA are working on it, and there’s big bucks involved, so it won’t be long.

Saints protect us. In the past year, drones have crashed at a TV commercial shoot in Vancouver, a University of Kentucky football game and even in the stands at the tennis U.S. Open.

On Sept. 12, a commercial drone smashed into a street in Pasadena, Calif., slightly injuring an 11-month-old girl in her stroller.

Singer Enrique Iglesias needed reconstructive surgery on his hand after grabbing a camera drone during a May concert in Tijuana.

Aircraft fighting California wildfires were grounded five times this summer because of small video drones flown by “gawkers.”

U.S. pilots reported 650 close calls with drones this year, up to Aug. 9, compared to 238 in all of 2014.

At Toronto’s Pearson airport, jets have had to switch runways when pilots spotted an errant drone.

Yet, safety rules for unmanned flyers are still months away. An FAA task force report is expected this week, and will likely recommend a drone registry that includes hobbyists. A registry. Sure, that’ll do the trick.

In Canada, non-commercial drones don’t even require a permit, just guidelines, such as avoiding passenger jets and basketball players. A full Canadian drone safety rulebook is not expected until 2017.

’Til then, keep your head up.

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