FLASHJET Paint Removal Systems Completes Fiftieth Apache Fuselage

The FLASHJET® coatings removal system, produced by The Boeing Company, completed paint stripping of the fiftieth AH-64 Apache at the Boeing rotorcraft assembly plant in Mesa, Ariz. This milestone was reached as part of the AH-64D pre-modification program, under which early model AH-64 attack helicopters are converted to the Apache Longbow configuration.

The FLASHJET process uses a combination of pulsed light energy and a steady stream of dry ice pellets to remove up to 4 square feet of paint per minute. As opposed to chemical stripping and media blast processes, the environmentally safe FLASHJET process produces more than 90 percent less waste at up to 66 percent less cost.

The FLASHJET system has been in operation at the Boeing rotorcraft facility in Mesa since May 1996. It is the first system built to satisfy a specific production stripping requirement and includes a robotic gantry system developed by PaR Systems, Inc., Shoreview, Minn.

The highly reliable system in Mesa has produced paint-stripping cycle times of about 12 hours with only one operator, compared with three days with two operators using other paint-stripping methods.

"The FLASHJET system is our only autonomous work area," said Billy Lester, manager, production flight test. "One technician programs the equipment, makes the set up, inspects the work and manages the control room. This is possible because it is a very user-friendly process," he said.

With the FLASHJET process, there is no pre-clean or masking required prior to stripping. Once the coating has been removed, the cleaned surface is ready to paint with no further preparation.

The FLASHJET process has been tested and verified to be safe for all types of metallic and composite substrates, including fiberglass, kevlar and boron/graphite epoxy-based components. It can be used for high-rate stripping of aircraft components, tactical aircraft and transport aircraft.

Additional FLASHJET systems will become operational in 1998 -- for the U.S. Navy at Naval Air Station Kingsville, Texas, and for Singapore Technologies Aerospace. Another system is in a P-3C aircraft demonstration program at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla.

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