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Boeing has begun flight-testing a number of enhancements installed on board a NATO AWACS aircraft. These upgrades are part of the \$491 million NATO Mid-Term Modernization Program. Retrofit of the entire fleet of 17 aircraft will be implemented during a follow on contract.

During the first of 40 scheduled flights, operators evaluated whether the aircraft's radar, identification friend or foe electronics, navigation, computers/displays and mission systems performed as designed.

The flight test program, including engineering test and evaluation and qualification testing, is scheduled to run until January 2002.

Ed Froese, Boeing NATO AWACS program manager, said, "We're excited about the results of the first flight. We collected data on Multi Sensor Integration and Identification Friend or Foe. This information will be analyzed to assess the performance and to make any needed changes. All in all, first flight was very successful in launching our test program. Many thanks to our customers, suppliers and all the dedicated people at Boeing for their efforts and vision."

The enhancements include:

- Fourteen new work-station consoles with flat-panel situation displays offering a Windows-like feel;
- A mission computing system with an open-system architecture allowing cost-effective future upgrades to the hardware and software. Multi-Sensor Integration will improve the reliability and accuracy of the tracking process and target identification;
- Digital communications systems to improve crew access to available radio links and provide automatic record and replay of communication and display data. Satellite communications will be integrated into the mission system offering a wider range of improved over-the horizon communication via satellite links;
- Upgraded aircraft navigation that takes advantage of the new Global Positioning System;
- Broad-spectrum VHF radios that will support increased operations with Eastern European nations' air and ground forces. An improved identification friend or foe (IFF) transponder will be compatible with emerging international air traffic control systems requirements. Additionally, an IFF Mode S interrogator has been installed providing a new communication link between the AWACS and other aircraft.

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