Boeing Airborne Laser Lights Up Test Facility

The Boeing [NYSE: BA] Airborne Laser (ABL) team fired a laser beam for the first time using the flight laser modules in the ABL System Integration Lab at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

Boeing is the team lead and system integrator for the ABL system under contract to the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, and involves placing a megawatt-class, high-energy Chemical Oxygen Iodine Laser (COIL) on a Boeing 747-400F aircraft to detect, track and destroy ballistic missiles in the boost phase of flight. ABL can also pass information on launch site, target track and predicted impact point to other layers of the global ballistic missile defense system.

"Today, we successfully demonstrated the critical element necessary for the ABL to enter the next phase of its testing," said Jim Evatt, vice president and general manager of Boeing Missile Defense Systems. "We're proud of the ABL team for overcoming the many first-of-a-kind obstacles to get to this point and look forward to the deployment of ABL."

The lasing or "first light" event follows a series of chemical activation tests that occurred over the past year at Edwards AFB. The first light test simultaneously operated the laser's six COIL modules, optics and chemical supply system.

The ABL aircraft also is conducting a series of flight tests to validate the air worthiness and functionality of the battle management and beam control/fire control (BC/FC) segments integrated on the 747-400F ABL aircraft. In addition to determining missile target location, the ABL 's adaptive optics in the BC/FC continually compensate for the atmospheric distortion and platform jitter to focus the high energy beam on the missile body, causing it to structurally fail.

Boeing is the weapon system integrator for ABL and provides the modified aircraft and battle management segments. Other ABL partners include Northrop-Grumman, which provides the laser segment and Lockheed Martin, which provides the BC/FC segment.

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For further information:
Kerry A. Gildea
Boeing Missile Defense Systems
(703) 414-6341
kerry.a.gildea@boeing.com
Maj. Catherine Reardon
Missile Defense Agency
(703) 697-8491
catherine.reardon@mda.mil