Boeing's Airborne Laser Team Installs All Major Laser Components on ABL Aircraft

ST. LOUIS, Feb. 22, 2008 -- The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA], industry teammates and the U.S. Missile Defense Agency have achieved a significant milestone for the revolutionary Airborne Laser (ABL) missile defense program with the installation of all six chemical oxygen iodine laser (COIL) modules on the ABL aircraft at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

"ABL's weapon system integration team has done a tremendous job installing major components of the high-energy laser aboard the aircraft, and they remain on track to reach the missile shoot-down demonstration planned for 2009," said Scott Fancher, vice president and general manager of Boeing Missile Defense Systems.

Overall laser integration is more than 70 percent complete. Once plumbing and wiring installation occurs and final inspections of the laser are complete, system activation and ground tests of the laser inside the aircraft will begin. Facilities, testing and safety procedures at Edwards are being upgraded to accommodate laser tests in the aircraft hangar.

"By implementing lessons learned and Lean-plus process improvements, the team has reduced laser installation time on the aircraft to about one-third from what was required when the laser modules were installed in the system integration laboratory at Edwards," Fancher noted.

The laser modules were demonstrated successfully in ground testing in late 2005 in the system integration laboratory at Edwards and completed the refurbishment phase in late 2007. ABL's low-power beam control and fire control systems demonstrated their capability in 2007 by tracking an airborne target, measuring and compensating for atmospheric turbulence and firing a surrogate high-energy laser at the target. This dual-path approach demonstrated all of ABL's key technologies. Integration of the high-energy laser in the aircraft will lead to ground and flight tests of the entire ABL weapon system, culminating in an airborne intercept test against a ballistic missile in 2009.

The Airborne Laser consists of a modified Boeing 747-400F whose back half holds the high-energy laser, designed and built by Northrop Grumman. The aircraft's front half contains the beam control/fire control system, developed by Lockheed Martin, and the battle management system, provided by Boeing.

Boeing is the prime contractor for ABL, which will provide speed-of-light capability to destroy all classes of ballistic missiles in their boost phase of flight. ABL's speed, precision and lethality also have potential for other missions, including destroying air-to-air, cruise and surface-to-air missiles.

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Contact Info:
Marc Selinger
Boeing Missile Defense Systems
office: 703) 414-6138
marc.selinger@boeing.com
Lynn Farrow
Boeing Missile Defense Systems
office: (703) 414-6169
lynn.farrow@boeing.com
Rick Lehner
Missile Defense Agency
office: (703) 697-8997
richard.lehner@mda.mil