Boeing's Airborne Laser Team Begins Laser Activation Tests

ST. LOUIS, May 28, 2008 -- The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA], industry teammates and the U.S. Missile Defense Agency achieved another significant milestone for the Airborne Laser (ABL) missile defense program this month by completing the first laser activation testing on the ground at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

"ABL's weapon system integration team has done a great job preparing the high-energy laser for activation testing, which will ensure each laser subsystem is brought on line sequentially and safely," said Scott Fancher, vice president and general manager of Boeing Missile Defense Systems. "Laser installation and the start of laser activation move the program a giant step closer to ABL's missile shoot-down demonstration planned for 2009."

The final plumbing and wiring installations will be completed in the coming weeks. All major components of the weapon system, including the battle management system, laser components, and beam control/fire control system, were installed earlier.

Laser activation testing is a methodical process to ensure ABL's high-energy chemical laser has been properly integrated aboard the aircraft and is ready to produce enough power to destroy a ballistic missile. The tests first flow water or other inert substances through the laser to verify its integrity. Next, the laser's chemicals flow through the laser to confirm sequencing and control.

When the activation tests are complete, ground firings of the laser will occur, followed by flight tests of the entire ABL weapon system. The test phase will culminate in an airborne intercept test against a ballistic missile in 2009.

The ABL aircraft 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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