

# RCCTO                      Reviews                      E-HEL Candidates for C-UAS Mission

*By Richard Scott*

The US Army is reviewing industry white papers outlining High Energy Laser (HEL) weapon system solutions capable of meeting the service's fast-track counter-unmanned aerial system (C-UAS) Battalion force protection requirement.

Responses to the Enduring High Energy Laser (E-HEL) weapon system Broad Agency Announcement were submitted to the Army's Rapid Capabilities and Critical Technologies Office (RCCTO) on Aug. 14

The US Army has identified a growing threat to troops from the increasing availability and sophistication of Group 1-3 UAS platforms designed to provide adversary forces with intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and attack capabilities (the latter through the delivery of submunitions or via one-way kamikaze attacks). These threat systems are well suited to conduct tactical and operational level missions, can be launched from forward operating positions without the use of conventional runways, and are difficult to detect and destroy due to their low flight altitude and small size.

As a counter to this threat, the RCCTO is seeking HEL-based weapon solutions for integration into common Army Air and Missile Defense networks to demonstrate a capability to defeat Group 1-3 UASs utilizing an "engage-on-the-short-halt" capable platform. The current objective is to procure an E-HEL system capable of fixed site defense (palletized) and/or integration onto an existing Army platform, such as a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle. The proposed solution should also accommodate modular open system architecture weapon system design considerations. The RCCTO plans Phase I Other Transaction Authority (OTA) prototype awards in early Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) under which

selected laser weapon systems will undergo an expedited government-led field test program to demonstrate that they are safe and suitable for operational use. This will pave the way for the selection of a prime contractor for Phase II production by the first quarter of fiscal year FY26 (1QFY26). According to the RCCTO, candidate E-HEL systems should be ready for a sensor and laser lethality characterization test in 1QFY25, a lab demonstration in 2QFY25, an integrated system field test in 3QFY25. The system solution should be "production-representative" by the end of Phase I. Following the integrated system test event, the RCCTO intends to select a single prime contractor for the award of a follow-on production OTA contract in 3QFY26. The scope of this award will include the production of 10 HEL system units through FY28, with an option for 10 additional units between FY28-31.