

US Army Selects LOCUST X3 for E-HEL Counter-UAS Laser

By Richard Scott

The US Army has selected AeroVironment (Albuquerque, NM) to meet its requirement for a counter-unmanned aircraft system (C-UAS) laser directed energy weapon system satisfying its Enduring-High Energy Laser (E-HEL) program.

Awarded by the service's Portfolio Acquisition Executive for Fires (PAE Fires) program office, the \$464.8 million Other Transaction Agreement (OTA) will see AeroVironment deliver its LOCUST X3 30 kW-class laser weapon for integration on various army platforms, including the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). The award, covering up to 24 systems, represents the US Army's first production contract for an HEL weapon.

Built upon the success of the Army Multi-Purpose High Energy Laser (AMP-HEL) prototypes currently in use, E-HEL is designed to protect semi-fixed and maneuver forces against Group 1-3 UASs. Adopting a platform-agnostic, modular open systems approach consisting of 11 major interfaces, the system is designed for deployment from fixed bases, semi-fixed tactical sites, and mobile combat vehicles.

According to AeroVironment, the company's selection for the E-HEL program follows successful C-UAS testing of LOCUST at White Sands Missile Range, led by Joint Interagency Task Force 401 (JIATF-401) and PAE Fires. This activity "demonstrated safe, effective counter-drone operations in US airspace and directly enabled a [Department of War – Federal Aviation Administration] safety agreement validating the system for domestic use," said AeroVironment.

LOCUST X3, as the latest evolution of the LOCUST line, introduces enhanced power, modularity, and AeroVironment's

AV_HALO AI-driven precision aim and tracking software. As well as JLTV, the Army is exploring options for palletized configurations, and analyzing the potential to integrate on an Infantry Squad Vehicle in the near future.

AeroVironment said it will deliver “dozens of LOCUST X3 laser weapon systems over the next few years” in support of the Army’s multi-year E-HEL fielding requirements. The company is making a \$30 million investment in its Albuquerque facility to ramp up production output.

The company also announced it had received a contract valued at more than \$50 million from an undisclosed international customer for 20-kW LOCUST Laser Weapons Systems (a predecessor to the LOCUST X3) and support. The sale marks the company’s first export order for the LOCUST LWS.