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NAVY'S T-45 PROGRAM BUYS NEW METHOD TO STRIP PAINT

The Naval Air (NAVAIR) T-45 Program, located at the Naval Air Station (NAS), Patuxent River, Md., will be the first program in the Department of the Navy to procure and use a new, environmentally friendly, paint-stripping system. The new system, called the FLASHJET® Coating Removal System, is less expensive to use, significantly more accurate, and less time consuming than traditional paint stripping methods.

The new system will be used on the T-45 at the Naval Air Station in Kingsville, Tx., and is expected to save the program \$7.1 million over the aircrafts lifetime. The new FLASHJET system facility in Kingsville opened July 20th with a dedicated ceremony attended by local, state and Navy dignitaries. The ceremony featured the first T-45 stripped using the new system.

The new system was designed to meet current and upcoming environmental regulations and reduce costs. The Department of Defense currently uses traditional paint stripping processes which are expensive and by their very nature generate hazardous waste and air pollutants. At \$1.50 per gallon of waste, one Naval Aviation Depot reportedly incurred an annual cost of more than \$2.5 million to treat the hazardous waste created by chemical stripping operations.

The Becker Laboratory at the Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, Md., teamed with the Air Force Warner-Robins Air Logistics Center and the Boeing Company to develop the patented system which uses an intense light, known as Xenon Flashlamp, and dry ice pellets to remove paint.

The FLASHJET system could reduce hazardous waste to less than 400,000 pounds per year at a single facility – less than half the waste produced by other processes. Previous paint methods generated 1.3 million pounds per year. Experts base this estimate on a single facility depainting 50 aircraft per year with chemical strippers.

In addition to being more environmentally friendly, the FLASHJET system is less time consuming to use than traditional methods and requires little maintenance. Traditional methods required at least five days to complete an aircraft; with the new process, removing paint from an entire aircraft and readying the aircraft for repaint takes about three and half days.

Currently, the Navy is working with two FLASHJET system models. One model is a fixed-robotic system for small aircraft, such as the T-45. The fixed-robotic FLASHJET system has been installed in a Kingsville hangar. The second model is a Mobile Vehicle Integrated Manipulator for larger aircraft, such as the P-3 or C-130, which can be driven and used indoors or outdoors. The mobile unit capable of stripping is currently being installed at the Naval Aviation Depot in Jacksonville, Fl., and could be demonstrated as early as September.

