Sikorsky Assembling CH-53K Helicopter Ground Test Vehicle

PARIS, France -

Sikorsky has begun assembly of the CH-53K Helicopter Ground Test Vehicle (GTV) at Sikorsky's Florida Assembly and Flight Operations (FAFO) facility in West Palm Beach, Florida, marking progress toward the system validation test phase of the Heavy Lift Replacement Program. Sikorsky Aircraft Corp. is a subsidiary of United Technologies Corp. (**NYSE:UTX**).

The GTV is the first of five prototype aircraft that will be built at the FAFO facility, under a $3 billion System Development and Demonstration (SDD) contract to develop a heavy lift helicopter replacement for the U.S. Marine Corps CH-53E helicopter. When the GTV prototype is assembled, it will be delivered to the Sikorsky Development Flight Center, located adjacent to the FAFO facility, to undergo ground-flight testing in early 2012. First flight is expected to occur during fiscal year 2014. The new aircraft program is planned to include production of more than 200 aircraft.

"When you see the components of the prototype aircraft being assembled, you begin to envision the power and capability that will be delivered with the CH-53K helicopter," said CH-53K Helicopter Program Manager David Zack. "The main rotor hub and transmission on this new machine weigh 15,000 pounds – as much as a BLACK HAWK helicopter – and will carry nearly triple the payload of its predecessor, the CH-53E helicopter. It is an awesome sight to see this aircraft coming together after several years of designing, planning and coordination."

"This program is well beyond design and planning, and the Ground Test Vehicle is in position four of the assembly line. We are looking forward to realizing the benefits of our technological advancements to the build process, along with physical integration of the subsystems throughout the build and ground test process," Zack added.

Sikorsky opened the FAFO assembly center in March 2011, establishing a prototype assembly line for the new CH-53K Helicopter Operations Center. The state-of-the-art assembly facility provides wireless data connections to all operator plasma data screens and introduces the use of digital operation sheets to aid technicians through the four-position assembly line process. The facility is also outfitted with overhead power and air dropdowns, new aircraft work stands and overhead cranes to support aircraft final assembly and rotor head assembly operations.

A total of five SDD prototype aircraft will be built at the FAFO facility and participate in the ground/flight test program, with two additional airframe ground test articles to be assembled at Sikorsky's main manufacturing plant in Stratford, Conn. Once assembled, the ground test articles will undergo a series of structural tests ensuring safe operations of the Engineering Development Model (EDM) flight vehicles.

The CH-53K SDD program comprises major subcontracts valued at more than $1.1B.

The CH-53K helicopter will maintain virtually the same footprint as its predecessor, the three-engine CH-53E SUPER STALLION&™ helicopter, but will nearly triple the payload to 27,000 pounds over 110 nautical miles under "high hot" ambient conditions. The CH-53E helicopter is currently the largest, most powerful marinized helicopter in the world. It is deployed fromU.S.Marine Corps amphibious assault ships to transport personnel and equipment and to carry external (sling) cargo loads.

The CH-53K helicopter's maximum gross weight (MGW) with internal loads is 74,000 pounds compared to 69,750 pounds for the CH-53E. The CH-53K MGW with external loads is 88,000 pounds as compared to 73,500 for the CH-53E helicopter.

CH-53K helicopter features include: a modern glass cockpit; fly-by-wire flight controls with active inceptors; fourth generation rotor blades with anhedral tips; a low-maintenance elastomeric rotor head; upgraded engines, each delivering in excess of 7,500 shaft horsepower; a locking cargo rail system; three external cargo hooks for improve cargo handling; improved survivability and reliability, maintainability and supportability. The program is expected to achieve the Initial Operational Capability milestone in 2018.

Sikorsky Aircraft Corp., based in Stratford, Conn., USA, is a world leader in helicopter design, manufacture, and service. United Technologies Corp., based in Hartford, Conn., USA, provides a broad range of high technology products and support services to the aerospace and building systems industries.

Please visit www.utcaero.com for Sikorsky and United Technologies news at the Paris Air Show 2011.

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