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LWI - LAND WARFARE

Lasers are coming, but are personnel protected?

23rd April 2018 - 18:21 GMT | by [Eric Tegler](#) in Maryland

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The US Army's recent tests of high-energy laser systems, **including on the Stryker combat vehicle**, illustrates a potential problem with their use; the safety of personnel exposed to them.

Though counter-UAS tests have been reportedly effective, demonstrations have been limited by the need to ensure all engagements are below-the-horizon so as not to risk blinding nearby aircraft.

Coming with such limitations is uneven recognition that effective training with – and fighting against – tactical laser systems will require protecting the eyes of those in contact with them.

'As more laser threats emerge, we're being asked to design eyewear that protects against more laser wavelengths,' said Dustin Levy, director of aircrew systems product at flight equipment supplier, Gentex Corp.

Gentex has already sold approximately 3,000 pairs of its EDU-7P laser eye protection glasses and another 500 pairs of F-35 training spectacles to the US Navy at \$500 to \$1000 per pair.

Despite these sales, Gentex has no broader affiliations with laser weapons systems producers or integrators.

At the recent Navy League Sea-Air-Space Exposition in Washington DC, *Shephard* asked representatives from four prime contractors – BAE Systems, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman – if, as systems integrators, they had considered eye protection for their various platforms.

None articulated formal laser protection initiatives or supplier relationships.

BAE Systems, which supplies the Striker II Helmet Mounted Display (HMD) for the Eurofighter Typhoon and other aircraft, said it has the ability to apply laser eye protection to the Striker II HMD but acknowledges that it is not part of the baseline product.

The US military has generally dealt with laser eye protection via programme or contracting offices.

In 2016, the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center awarded a \$30 million contract for Aircrew Laser Eye Protection (ALEP) spectacles to Teledyne Scientific & Imaging.

The Army's PEO Soldier officially includes only one piece of LEP gear in its equipment portfolio, an LEP visor that integrates with its HGU-56/P helicopter helmet. However, *Shephard* has not been able to confirm any dedicated laser eye protection technical groups within the air force or army.

By contrast, electro-optical equipment makers such as Safran Optics have long had to comply with US Food and Drug Administration eye protection guidelines for their commercial systems.

At Sea-Air-Space, Safran showed *Shephard* three pieces from its military product line – a high resolution thermal viewer, a laser rangefinder, and binoculars – all of which have integrated laser eye protection to high/classified levels.

Company executives say integrating this protection into such devices is a matter of routine.

Clearly, the need for laser eye protection has yet to generate a coordinated response from industry or the US military but that could soon change.

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