

# Sky Talk

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Airlines, travel and aerospace

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### AVX gets Army contract to study reducing OH-58 fuel consumption

AVX Aircraft Co., the small Fort Worth start-up company trying to get a foot in the door of the military helicopter business, seems to have gotten the attention of the U.S. Army's aviation leadership.



AVX has been awarded a second contract for studying the performance of its ideas that company officials say could dramatically improve the performance of existing and future helicopters.

The Army awarded AVX a small contract, about \$500,000, to study how to reduce the fuel consumption and improve performance of the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter. The goal is to achieve a 30 percent reduction in fuel consumption.

AVX has already proposed a radical makeover of the Army's OH-58Ds that would boost speed, payload and high altitude/hot day performance through the use of its coaxial-rotor and ducted fans propulsion system.

The Army has previously awarded AVX a contract for further technology studies aimed at applying its technology to a future helicopter the service hopes to begin work on a few years from now.

So with two contracts in hand, has AVX gotten at least a toehold with the Army in a business where it's competing with established heavyweights like Bell Helicopter, Sikorsky and Boeing?

AVX President Troy Gaffey was asked that question last week at the American Helicopter Society meeting in Fort Worth. His response: "I think they're very receptive. I think we have a very good relationship."

The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is the Army's desire for a new generation of scout helicopters or, given the possibility there will be no money for new aircraft, ways to significantly upgrade the OH-58Ds.

The Bell-built helicopters, already upgraded time and again, have been heavily worked in Afghanistan and Iraq -- more than 100 hours of flight time a month recently, according to the Army -- and will need further, major upgrades if they are to last another 15 or 20 years as now planned.

Army leaders have asked industry for proposal on how to improve or replace the OH-58D, but have also said they doubt there will be funds for an all new aircraft.

Boeing and a Lockheed Martin-Eurocopter team will try to convince the Army it can afford to buy their new helicopters in the immediate future. Sikorsky is developing all new design using its X2 high-speed technology that it hopes to fly in 2014.

Bell Helicopter and AVX, meanwhile, are both proposing the Army plan on further upgrades to boost OH-58 performance, which they say could be done at far less cost than new aircraft and would be easier to get Pentagon and Congressional approval.

- Bob Cox

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