

## U.S. Army to Launch 2026 Competition for Anti-Drone Laser Weapon

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The U.S. Army is moving forward with plans to launch a competition in fiscal year 2026 aimed at fielding a rugged, vehicle-mounted laser weapon system designed to counter drone threats across multiple combat environments.

This marks a shift from experimental use to operational capability in the Army's ongoing pursuit of directed-energy weapons. Over the last five years, the service has developed and tested 17 laser prototypes, including 11 deployed to the U.S. Central Command area. Among these are four 50-kilowatt DE M-SHORAD systems mounted on Stryker vehicles. The initiative underscores the military's interest in replacing costly munitions with precision, low-cost-per-shot alternatives for short-range air defense.

While lasers offer substantial advantages in terms of magazine depth and targeting precision, they have faced technical hurdles, particularly in harsh and unpredictable field conditions. The upcoming program, named the Enduring High Energy Laser, will focus on building systems that are modular, reliable, and easily repairable under battlefield conditions. Army officials stressed the need for line-replaceable components to avoid reliance on clean-room maintenance and increase mission readiness.

Lt. Gen. Robert Rasch, who heads the Rapid Capabilities and Critical Technologies Office, emphasized the importance of separating laser payloads from specific vehicles. This approach would allow for broader deployment across platforms such as Strykers, Joint Light Tactical Vehicles, and even robotic ground systems, increasing operational flexibility and reducing logistical strain.

Initial capability requirements are expected to be released to industry partners within 60 days, with formal solicitations to follow shortly thereafter. John Garrity, vice president of BlueHalo, now part of AeroVironment, said the announcement signals that defense contractors must prepare for rapid scaling and timely delivery once the acquisition phase begins.

The 2026 competition represents a significant step toward integrating directed-energy systems into the Army's core defense strategy. With the growing use of unmanned aerial systems by adversaries, a reliable counter-drone laser weapon could become a critical asset on future battlefields. The move reinforces the Army's intent to transition from experimentation to deployment, pushing industry partners to deliver operational capabilities that meet the demands of modern warfare.