

Army on the lookout for better flashlights

By Matthew Cox
mcox@militarytimes.com

The Army wants to update its soldier flashlight from the angle-head design the service has kept in stock for more than six decades.

Because of the proliferation of tactical-style flashlights on the commercial market, the Army is working on a "Family of Flashlights" to fit a range of tasks.

At the request of the Infantry Center at Fort Benning, Ga., Army equipment officials are looking at the commercial market for hands-free, hand-held, individual weapon- and crew-served lights that would make up the family.

If approved, the Army could spend up to \$300 million on the effort, according to Maj. Kathy Brown, assistant product manager for clothing and individual equipment.

The proposal first must clear the Army's senior leadership and the Defense Department's Joint Re-

quirements Oversight Council.

If the program wins Army approval, equipment officials likely won't know how much money they'll get for new flashlights until fall 2009, Fred Coppola, deputy product manager for clothing and individual equipment, said.

The next decision will be to decide how the flashlights will be issued, Brown said. Depending on their job, soldiers might receive any combination of the four types of lights in the family, equipment officials said.

Program Executive Office Soldier began issuing weapon-mounted lights to combat troops in 2002 for search operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army hasn't issued the olive green, D Cell-battery-powered angle-head flashlight since the 1990s, but it is still available for units to request.

The Army has been reluctant to issue individual flashlights because most soldiers prefer to select

their own and there are dozens of makes and models to choose from on the market, Coppola said.

For now, equipment officials have identified 21 flashlights from 10 different companies for PEO Soldier's Approved Family of Flashlights List. Until the Army funds the program, soldiers or units will have to continue to buy their own individual flashlights.

Coppola said the approved list is designed to "let them know what the best lights are out there. We want them to know that the lights on our list have been tested to certain specs."

The flashlights listed vary in price between \$50 and \$300 each.

As for the individual weapon- and crew-served lights, equipment officials said they are in the early stages of testing and would not give details on specific models.

Specifically with the crew-served light, officials said they are trying to determine how wide the beam should be and how far the beam can reach. They also have to ensure that the lights are effective in every urban scenario, whether it's in a dark alley or a well-lighted section of a city, said Lt Col. Joe Capobianco, product manager for sensors and lasers. □