Army Testing More Effective Ghillie Suits

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The Army is looking for an improved ghillie suit to replace the flame-resistant, camouflage suit now worn by snipers to keep them from being seen by the enemy.

The current ghillie suits are bulky, somewhat uncomfortable and hot in warm weather, said Debbie Williams, a systems acquisition expert with Program Executive Office Soldier, Product Manager Soldier Clothing and Individual Equipment.

The current suit is known as the Flame Resistant Ghillie System (FRGS). The replacement the Army is looking for will be called the Improved Ghillie System (IGS), Williams said. She added that although the term "flame resistant" is not in the new name, the IGS will still have flame-resistant properties. Soldiers will receive most of their protection from the base layer worn under the IGS, such as the Flame Resistant Combat Uniform (FR ACU).

The IGS will be a modular system, worn over the field uniform, she said. It will be modular in that it can be taken apart, with pieces added or subtracted as needed, such as sleeves, leggings, veil, cape, and so on.

Another change is that the IGS will not come with the accessory kit, like the one supplied with the FRGS, Williams said. It was found that Soldiers were not using a majority of the items in their accessory kit or preferred a different material.

Williams said the cost of the IGS will be lower than the current $1,300 FRGS.

Mary Armacost, a textile technologist with Product Manager Soldier Clothing and Individual Equipment, said the IGS will be made of lighter, more breathable material than the FRGS. Also, the material for the skeins that accompany the IGS will be stiffer than that of the FRGS, thereby making the IGS more effective at camouflaging the Soldier.

The current ghillie suit, known as the Flame Resistant Ghillie System, is shown above. A new suit is under development. (U.S. Army photo)

About 3,500 suits are expected to be produced under the contract for approximately 3,300 snipers in all three Army components, as well as Soldiers in U.S. Special Operations Command, Williams said.

After the samples are obtained, lab and field testing will begin at various locations, she said. For example, the Army's Night Vision Laboratory will do full-spectrum testing. It will also use night vision goggles to see how well the suits remain hidden in darkened conditions.

Daytime testing for visual camouflage effectiveness will take place as well, with sniper-qualified Soldiers at Eglin Air Force Base, FL, Williams said. Additionally, acoustic testing will be done by the Army Research Laboratory (ARL) to determine how much noise the IGS produces in field conditions.

ARL will also test the effectiveness of the fabric regarding tear resistance and fire retardant effectiveness, she added.

Following all of this, a limited user evaluation should commence next spring using instructors from the Sniper School at Fort Benning, GA.