NEWS FROM THE U.S. PARTNERSHIP FOR ASSURED ELECTRONICS (USPAE)

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U.S. Department of Defense Awards Contract to Launch Defense Electronics Consortium

Jan. 26, 2021 (WASHINGTON) – The U.S. Partnership for Assured Electronics (www.USPAE.org) has received a $42 million award from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to establish and manage the Defense Electronics Consortium (DEC). The mission of this consortium is to strengthen the economic and force posture of the U.S. defense electronics industrial base, and its first project will be to advance the adoption of lead-free electronics in defense systems.

“This consortium will give DoD deeper insights into the electronics industry, including how the industry supports defense missions,” said retired Rear Admiral Kevin M. Sweeney, former Pentagon Chief of Staff and USPAE board member. “The DEC will facilitate interactions between DoD and the electronics industry, providing a stronger voice and greater opportunities for companies that are often buried several layers deep in the supply chain.”

The new consortium is designed to address the defense risks created by the contraction of the U.S. electronics manufacturing sector over the last 20 years. The U.S. share of global production of printed circuit boards (PCBs) shrank from about 30 percent in the 1990s to less than 5 percent today. U.S. government reports in 2005 and 2018 warned that the trend could imperil the nation's ability to quickly field reliable, cutting-edge defense electronics.

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic shone a spotlight on the extent to which the U.S. had outsourced the manufacturing of vitally needed medical equipment with electronic components. As noted in the DoD’s 2020 Industrial Capabilities report to Congress, defense weapons systems and critical infrastructure could face similar supply chain challenges if nothing is done to change course.

The new consortium provides a vehicle for DoD to contract with trusted partners in industry and academia, including small and medium-sized innovators that typically do not do business with DoD. Through a variety of programs such as conferences, networking events, white papers, and collaboration projects, the DEC will tackle numerous defense electronics challenges and innovations. Participants may include companies that make printed circuit boards, microelectronics, cable harnesses, and connectors, and other components, along with companies that assemble electronic systems and those that provide materials and equipment for manufacture and assembly.

The first project to flow through the DEC will be the Lead-Free Defense Electronics Project, which will be led by Purdue University, the University of Maryland, and Auburn University. The project will foster research and action to accelerate the transition to lead-free electronics in aerospace, defense, and other high-performance electronics.

The DEC will be created and managed by USPAE, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit industry association dedicated to ensuring the U.S. government has access to resilient and trusted electronics supply chains. USPAE was created with significant input from IPC, the leading standards and trade association for the electronic industry. “Our relationship with IPC gives us immediate access to about 2,000 U.S. companies and academic institutions,” said Christopher Peters, USPAE Executive Director. “An added benefit is the work IPC has already done with the DoD's Executive Agent for Printed Circuit Boards and Interconnect Technologies in establishing standards for trusted supply chain partners.”

USPAE has selected Advanced Technology International (ATI), the leader in R&D collaboration management, to handle DEC member engagement, financial controls, and administrative services. USPAE’s board of directors and executive director will be responsible for overall DEC strategy, governance, and member recruitment.

For further information, visit www.USPAE.org or send inquiries to info@uspae.org.

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