

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, THE BORDER, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, THE BORDER, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Chairman Grothman, Ranking Member Garcia, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to address the status of the V-22 Osprey program.

INTRO

Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) is responsible for the development, integration, testing, fielding, and sustainment of Naval Aviation capabilities. Our focus is on delivering the warfighting capability that the fleet, our sons and daughters, needs to execute their missions successfully and return home safely. This has been and continues to be the 'North Star' objective for NAVAIR.

Currently NAVAIR has oversight of just over 4000 individual aircraft across over 40 different types of aircraft and programs. This includes the V-22, which operates as a joint program of approximately 400 aircraft across the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), U.S. Navy (USN), U.S. Air Force (USAF), and Japan Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF).

The V-22 Joint Program Office is located in Patuxent River, Maryland, and is part of the Program Executive Officer for Air, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Assault, and Special Mission Programs (PEO(A)) portfolio managed by Mr. Gary Kurtz. In addition to management of the development, integration, testing, fielding and sustainment of the platform, the PEO, along with the V-22 program manager, is responsible for the overall risk management of the V-22 program.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE V-22

The V-22 tiltrotor platform was developed in response to the fleet need for an aircraft platform that could take off and land vertically while also carrying troops at speeds greater than a helicopter. USMC has had operational V-22 units since 2007 and today has 306 aircraft; USAF has had operational units since 2009 and today has 51 aircraft; USN has had operational units since 2020 and today has 29 aircraft. To date, the V-22 has logged more than 750,000 flight hours across all variants in operation.

NAVAIR'S ROLE IN SAFE FLIGHT OPERATIONS

NAVAIR serves as the airworthiness authority for Naval Aviation aircraft, akin to the role of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in a commercial setting. As such, NAVAIR and the relevant aircraft program offices are responsible for the safety of the aircraft throughout the full lifecycles of the platform from development, to fielding and operations. We take this responsibility very seriously and have developed robust processes to mitigate risk. If cases arise in which we can no longer maintain the necessary standard, NAVAIR is responsible for the grounding of aircraft until deemed safe for flight.

Throughout the life of any Naval Aviation platform, NAVAIR utilizes multiple data sets and risk assessments to ensure we maintain safe flight operations. This continuous process of risk assessment considers aspects of safety across the spectrum of how the platforms are designed, built, operated, and maintained. Data may be based on engineering risk assessments, quality reports, manufacturing data, lab testing, hazard reports, and safety investigation reports that are all assessed from a safety perspective. More importantly, controls and mitigations are implemented to address any safety concerns. NAVAIR has temporarily grounded several types of aircraft due to potential safety concerns. These decisions were not made lightly due to the operational impacts, but NAVAIR's responsibility to ensure safety is at the forefront of every action.

Naval aviation and Special Operations is an inherently dangerous profession, but NAVAIR's objective is to proactively manage every platform so as to prevent mishaps from ever occurring. In the event of an aviation mishap, which can range from a relatively minor ground incident to a catastrophic loss of life and/or aircraft, a Safety Investigation Board (SIB) is established to investigate the mishap, determine the root cause, and make recommendations to prevent future incidents. The SIB is comprised of experts from across all required technical competencies so that we reach a full understanding of what happened, how it happened and what we can do to prevent the event from occurring again.

HOW OVERSIGHT OF THE V-22 PROGRAM IS CONDUCTED

There are multiple levels of safety oversight for the V-22 program, some of which span the entirety of Naval Aviation and others which are specific to the program. The Naval Safety Command (NAVSAFECOM) sets the overall safety mandate for all of the Navy and conducts regular assessments of Naval Aviation safety procedures. Concurrently, NAVAIR administers System Safety policy and oversight for all Naval Aviation platforms, including the V-22. Internal to the V-22 program, each service dedicates representatives to facilitate cross-service coordination, review, and adjudication of safety items with an overarching objective of maintaining a proactive safety posture.

HOW THE PROGRAM OFFICE WORKS WITH MANUFACTURERS TO IMPLEMENT SAFETY MECHANISMS

The V-22 is a complex and revolutionary aircraft requiring continuous DOD and industry coordination. Bell-Boeing is the primary and most significant original equipment manufacturer (OEM) for the platform; Rolls-Royce and Raytheon are also responsible for key components of the aircraft. More than 30 other companies complete the sourcing pool for over 60,000 orderable parts on the V-22. There is regular coordination between OEMs and the program to work through engineering investigations, safety investigations, testing, design changes, etc., as well as regular contract actions taken to incorporate changes and update items. Safety concerns can be identified and reported by any manufacturer.

STATE OF V-22 SAFETY

While the historical mishap rate of the V-22 has, on average, been comparable to other platforms across the DoD, the rate of mishaps over the past two and a half years has the full attention and support of Navy, USMC and USAF leadership. During this period the V-22 program has had four mishaps that have resulted in the loss of 20 of our service members and four aircraft. NAVAIR and the joint V-22 program are focusing on addressing this issue with a clear understanding that there is much work still to be done. While the following information will focus on the most recent mishap, this same process is used for every mishap.

RECENT CV-22 MISHAP

On 29 Nov 2023, a U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) CV-22 operating off the coast of Japan was involved in a crash that resulted in the loss of 8 airmen and the aircraft. A Safety Investigation Board that included experts from the Navy, the Air Force and industry was immediately established to investigate.

On 6 Dec 2023, data was presented to NAVAIR that suggested that the probable root cause of the mishap was a catastrophic aircraft mechanical failure that had never been seen before in the V-22 fleet. Based on that data and acting in the capacity as airworthiness authority for the V-22, the NAVAIR commander made the decision to ground all V-22s until the failure mode was understood and the aircraft could safely return to flight.

Over the next couple of months, on a weekly basis, NAVAIR, USMC Deputy Commandant for Aviation, Commander Naval Air Forces and USAF Special Operations Commander engaged with the Safety Board president to review the data and analysis of the recovered aircraft components and data recorders. With this data, the SIB was able to determine the sequence of events that occurred and the root cause of the mishap. With this information, the NAVAIR team in coordination with USMC, USN and USAF aviation leadership developed a path to allow for a safe return to flight through implementation of specific controls.

The controls that are currently implemented to allow for safe flight operations include:

- Aircrew briefings on the mishap causal factors by NAVAIR
- Aircraft logbook reviews and serial number verification of safety critical life limited components
- Aircraft ground turns to verify proper operation of the V-22 drivetrain
- Mission-planning factors to limit the flight time required to land at a divert airfield
- Modified emergency procedures for the aircrew

UPDATE ON V-22 PROGRAM CURRENT STATE

Today, the V-22 fleet is cleared for flight in a restricted envelope that limits V-22 mission capability for each service. The decision to return to flight was not taken lightly. NAVAIR has established three lines of effort (Return to Flight, Return to Mission, and Comprehensive Review) related to the V-22. All three services, alongside industry partners, are working together to execute these critical tasks.

RETURN TO FLIGHT

The SIB inquiry into the November 2023 mishap has been completed and based on those results, the V-22 was cleared for restricted flight operations on 8 March 2024. Since the lifting of the grounding bulletin, the aircraft has flown over 7000 hours through 2 Jun 2024.

RETURN TO MISSION

NAVAIR is establishing criteria for return to full unrestricted flight through engineering testing and analysis. To reduce risk to the fleet, current flight restrictions will remain in place until these criteria are met. A return to full mission capability is not expected to occur before mid-2025.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

In parallel with our return to mission efforts a comprehensive review of program performance is underway, designed to make a long-term significant improvement in the safety, availability, and affordability of the V-22. This action, which was initiated prior to the most recent mishap, is still ongoing, with improvements being implemented with immediate effect.

This review represents a joint effort between USMC, USN, AFSOC, the V-22 Joint Program Office, NAVAIR, and industry partners (e.g., Bell-Boeing) to identify, prioritize, and execute safety risk reduction efforts that extend beyond the most recent mishap. This effort addresses all known risks, whether related to physical characteristics of the aircraft or non-material areas such as aircrew training, maintainer training, data collection and analysis, and administration of aircraft records.

The immediate focus is on safety with multiple, specialized teams established to determine root cause and mitigation to rapidly improve the safety of personnel and the aircraft. Efforts to improve platform availability and affordability are underway in parallel.

CLOSING SUMMARY

The NAVAIR and V-22 program teams are committed to ensuring the safety, reliability, and operational effectiveness of these critical platforms. Via our ongoing comprehensive review of the V-22 program, we will continue to pursue improvements to protect the lives of our service

members. As NAVAIR Commander, and the Program Executive Office for the V-22 Program, we have a vested interest in the safety of this platform and all aircraft for which we are responsible, and will not certify an aircraft to perform a mission unless confident in the ability of the aircraft to do so safely.