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## Sikorsky future brighter

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Sikorsky Aircraft's landing of a \$19 billion defense contract for heavy-lift helicopters should help the already strong Stratford company maintain and possibly increase employment for years to come, according to an aerospace analyst.

"It's good news for Sikorsky," said Raymond Jaworowski, senior aerospace analyst for Forecast International of Newtown. "It was expected."

He said analysts would have been more surprised if the Marines didn't award Sikorsky the 156-helicopter order. The plan is to have Sikorsky redesign a new version of its CH-53 Super Stallion. The CH-53K will replace the CH-53E.

The number of helicopters and the length of the contract — the first one is scheduled for delivery in 2015 — is encouraging, according to Jaworowski, because it will mean steady work for Sikorsky workers and the company's many suppliers.

Jaworowski said too much has been made of Sikorsky's loss of the Marine One presidential helicopter contract last year.

"We never thought the loss of the presidential fleet contract was a significant blow to Sikorsky," Jaworowski said. Losing that contract was more of a blow to the company's pride, he said, but the contract wasn't that big, and what really matters is having business coming through the door — and Sikorsky has that.

Jaworowski said Sikorsky has plenty of Black Hawk work and has won a number of small contracts for its newest helicopter, the S-92, over the past year.

"Overall, they're in good shape," he said.

Ed Steadham, a Sikorsky spokesman, said it was difficult to say how much of an impact the CH-53K contract will have on employment.

"Total employment is dependent on the health and prosperity of all our programs," Steadham said.

During the first eight years of the 10-year contract, the majority of work will be in engineering and design, he said, and the company will only produce five helicopters for testing. But over the life of the contract, the program will require hundreds of workers, he said.

Sikorsky expects to continue to see more S-92 sales in 2006 as the oil industry expands the search for new oil fields further out to sea, Steadham said. The S-92 has done well with oil companies that have bought it to ferry workers out to platforms in the North Sea, the Atlantic and Pacific.

Officials with Teamsters Union Local 1150, representing more than 3,000 Sikorsky workers, did not return calls for comment on the new contract.

But the union appears confident in Sikorsky's financial strength, and declared on its Web site in December: "While the company is enjoying such good times as they are now, this membership and negotiating committee would not entertain discussions concerning concessions."

Local 1150's contract expires in February, and the union and company have agreed to not talk to the media about the negotiations that began Dec. 14.

If that contract is settled in February, workers could get some good news in May.

Sikorsky is competing for the Air Force Combat Search and Rescue X contract for 140 helicopters.

Sikorsky is again up against the team of Lockheed Martin and Agusta/Westland for this contract, which the U.S. Department of Defense is expected to award in May. Lockheed and Agusta won the presidential helicopter contest.

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