NH90 HELICOPTER FLIES ON SUSTAINABLE FUEL

News / Manufacturer

With support from Safran Helicopter Engines, TotalEnergies, Airbus Helicopters, France's defense procurement agency (Direction Générale de l'Armement - DGA) has carried out the first test flight of an NH90, during which one of its two RTM322 engines ran on Sustainable Aviation Fuel. This fuel was produced by TotalEnergies from used cooking oil using HEFA technology and has a carbon footprint four times smaller than that of a fossil fuel. As such it meets the European Union's 65% abatement requirement for sustainable fuels.

This test flight took place on February 3, 2023 at the expertise and test centre DGA Essais en vol in Istres; it marks a first for a military helicopter with such high content of SAF, and without any engine modification. The fuel meets the aviation industry's objective of accelerating decarbonization without making any modifications to the aircraft, engine or logistics infrastructure (known as a drop-in fuel).

In December 2022, a bench test at Safran Helicopter Engines' Bordes facility validated the use of this fuel on the RTM322.

Christian Caneilles, head of Heavy Helicopter Engines programs at Safran Helicopter Engines, commented: "this is an important step in our roadmap for the large-scale deployment of SAF,

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which will kick-start a decarbonization process within the armed forces to gradually reduce the use of fossil fuels”.

SAF is one of initiatives from Safran Helicopter Engines aiming to reduce CO2 emissions from in-service engines. Its turbine range is already certified to run on 50% SAF. Safran Helicopter Engines is working to certify operations with 100% SAF, while assessing any operational impact with its partners and customers. When a 100% incorporation level is achieved, SAF offers a potential reduction in CO2 emissions of 80%.

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