



News Release

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ECBC Hosts International Obscurants Symposium

Nearly 190 obscurants experts convene at symposium in Baltimore to discuss enhancing survivability for the Warfighter

Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. – The U.S. Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center (ECBC) hosted an international group of nearly 190 obscurants experts last month at the 2011 Obscurants Symposium in Baltimore. The symposium offered opportunities for professionals from military installations, government contractors and high-tech companies to brief peers on current obscurant technologies, discuss future needs in obscurant capabilities and brainstorm new and effective ways to protect the 21st century Warfighter.

Smoke and obscurant has proven to be a cost effective force multiplier when used on the battlefield and is a key element in determining strategic goals and outcomes. During the history of U.S. conflicts, asymmetric threats and insurgencies, obscurant was used offensively and defensively to protect soldiers in the air, on land and at sea.

“Have we ever fought a fight that we were planning for,” asked Brigadier General Leslie Smith, Commander of the U.S. Army 20th Support Command. Smith served as the keynote speaker for the event and provided insight into why obscurants are important to the modern day Warfighter and stressed that we must be prepared for every type of threat whether we are planning for warfare or not.

Smith provided a vignette of the ideal situation for when obscurants would be a key player: Imagine a team leader in Iraq or Afghanistan facing snipers in an urban setting. The unit would be able to employ smoke to provide them with cover for 45 minutes while they diffuse the situation or move to a better location.

Since Smith assumed command last May there have been six soldiers killed from the 20th Support Command and he continues to search for ways to increase survivability. “That’s why I get up in the morning. I ask myself, what could I have done or given to them?”

His words helped to set the stage for the dialogue between scientists, engineers and other professionals in the field on how to best protect our soldiers.

“The challenge is to stay in front of new technologies being developed or bought by our adversaries,” said Larry Bickford, symposium chairman and branch chief for smoke and target defeat at ECBC.

Research for new obscurations can help in defeating these emerging threats, increasing the Warfighter's survivability. One of the most noted technologies was the development and future production of the M106 Fast Obscurant Grenade. The M106, to reach full rate production in the beginning of 2012, can disseminate its fill quickly and is appropriate for special and indoor operations.

While challenging to develop new and more effective measures to counter terrorist tactics that have yet to be implemented, other relevant topics discussed included manufacturing obscuration to be used in restricted terrain, such as caves and urban areas, and the utilization of obscurants to protect objects ranging in size from a single soldier to a nuclear power plant.

For more information on the symposium or the participants, please contact Larry Bickford, Symposium Chairman at 410-436-2231 or Lawrence.bickford@us.army.mil.

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About ECBC

ECBC is the Army's principal research and development center for chemical and biological defense technology, engineering and field operations. ECBC has achieved major technological advances for the Warfighter and for our national defense, with a long and distinguished history of providing the Armed Forces with quality systems and outstanding customer service. ECBC is a US Army Research, Development and Engineering Command laboratory located at the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. For more information about the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, please visit our Web site at <http://www.ecbc.army.mil> or call (410) 436-7118.