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**“Army-Led Biometrics Program Designated Major Acquisition Program”**

**Anne Plummer**

The Pentagon has decided to put its biometrics effort in a similar acquisition category as multibillion-dollar weapon systems, guaranteeing senior-level involvement in the program and more stringent oversight of money spent to buy technologies like fingerprint and iris scanners.

These kinds of capabilities increasingly are being used by the services to protect computer networks and control access to buildings. The Defense Department also is interested in outfitting some weapon systems with biometric controls. DOD's Biometrics Management Office (BMO), which is led by the Army, encourages the services to buy only technologies certified by them and has vowed to devise a department-wide acquisition strategy for biometrics.

In a recent memo, Pentagon Chief Information Officer John Stenbit designated the program as part of “acquisition category-1AM,” signifying it is a major automated information system.

According to Defense Department acquisition regulations, such a system usually will cost more than \$32 million in one year, or total more than \$126 million.

“Efforts should begin immediately to develop and coordinate the biometric mission needs and requirements” of the services with the Joint Requirements Oversight Council, Stenbit wrote May 15. As Pentagon CIO, Stenbit will hold “milestone decision authority” for the program, deciding whether the BMO's procurement plans are adequate.

Accordingly, a working group is being assembled to prepare for Milestone A.

Defense officials announced last fall they expected to devise by May 2003 an acquisition strategy for the slew of biometrics being purchased by the services to secure computer networks and buildings. Maj. Gen. Steven Boutelle, the Army's director of information operations, networks and space, told an industry audience in September that DOD wants build an initial biometric capability in fiscal year 2003 and refine it to become fully operational in 2005. Boutelle is slated to replace Lt. Gen. Peter Cuvillo as the next Army CIO.

“There is no requirements document for biometrics,” Boutelle said. “The requirement is for a higher level of security than we have today, and that enabler is biometrics.”

Boutelle said an operational architecture for biometrics would likely be completed by summer.