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Iridium LLC has 46 satellites for its IRIDIUM® constellation in orbit after the successful launch of a Boeing [NYSE: BA] Delta II rocket here today.

The launch took place at 5:16 a.m. PST, within the five-second window necessary to place the five satellites into coordinated orbits with the 41 satellites already in orbit. This was the last Delta II launch of 1997, a year in which 10 successful missions carried 34 spacecraft into orbit.

Prior to the IRIDIUM constellation, the largest satellite system launched by Delta was the 24-satellite U.S. Air Force Global Positioning System (GPS). The Air Force was the original customer for Delta II expendable rockets. It took 24 launches between February 1989 and March 1993 to build the entire GPS constellation.

Since that time, Boeing developed the technology necessary to carry up to five satellites per launch. This technology is allowing Boeing to help Motorola and Iridium meet their goal of providing global, wireless telecommunications by late 1998. In one-fourth of the missions and one-eighth of the time it took to build GPS, Delta has placed 30 IRIDIUM system satellites into orbit.

"We congratulate Boeing for the important role they've played in helping us set new records with the deployment of the IRIDIUM constellation," said Motorola Chief Executive Officer Christopher Galvin, "and look forward to the remaining three Boeing launches next year."

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