

Boeing To Conduct Joint Strike Fighter Final Assembly and First Flight in Palmdale

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Boeing today announced that final assembly and first flight of its two Joint Strike Fighter (X-32/JSF) demonstrator aircraft will take place in Palmdale, Calif., with subsequent landings at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

The Boeing JSF Program will use existing facilities in Palmdale to provide the infrastructure and personnel for sub-assembly, final assembly engineering support, ground testing and preparation for pre-flight checkout and first flight operations. Overall program responsibility will continue to be managed from Seattle.

Frank Statkus, Boeing vice president, general manager and JSF program manager, characterized the site selection as a best-value business decision that supports the affordability initiatives the company has set in place for building the next-generation fighter.

"Accomplishing this critical segment of work in Palmdale allows us to take full advantage of one of the world's premier experimental test flight facilities to meet our requirements relative to first flight," Statkus said. "More importantly, the cost savings associated with performing these activities at our existing facilities reinforces the Boeing commitment to making program decisions that provide tangible affordability benefits to our JSF customer."

Assembly of both X-32 aircraft including integration and checkout of the fuselage, and mating of the fuselage, wing and tail assemblies, will occur at Palmdale, while the forebody will be assembled at Boeing facilities in St. Louis. Prior to first flight, the assembled aircraft will undergo final system installation, extensive system checkout and ground and taxi testing at Palmdale.

"Conducting assembly and first flight from Palmdale is simply the correct decision," Statkus said. "The Palmdale location provides a test environment that's entirely compatible with ground testing these aircraft."

The anticipated JSF workforce in Palmdale will peak at approximately 200 workers and include current Boeing employees from Palmdale, Seattle, St. Louis, Seal Beach, Calif., and Downey, Calif. The Boeing Company currently has approximately 1,000 employees in Palmdale and an additional 100 employees at Edwards. No decisions have been made regarding final assembly locales for future program phases.

Following departure from Palmdale, both JSF demonstrator aircraft will accomplish initial airworthiness flight tests at Edwards. Afterward, both aircraft will be flown to Patuxent River, Md., for additional flight testing unique to the short-takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) and carrier-based (CV) operations.

Boeing is competing to build the next-generation strike fighter under a four-year Joint Navy and Air Force Concept Demonstration Phase (CDP) contract awarded in late 1996. The Boeing JSF team currently is building two JSF X-32 demonstrator aircraft; one of which will demonstrate characteristics of the Air Force conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) and the Navy's CV variants, and a second aircraft which will demonstrate the STOVL variant envisioned for use by the Marine Corps and the Royal Navy.

Boeing also is demonstrating critical technologies, processes and affordability initiatives that support the company's plan to produce an affordable JSF. In addition to building the demonstrator aircraft, Boeing also is defining the operational aircraft - the multi-service Preferred Weapon System Concept (PWSC) - for the next phase of the JSF program, the Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD) program. A competition winner will be selected in 2001, with actual fighter deployment set for 2008.

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