Boeing Rocket Investigation Focuses on Control System

The lead Boeing investigator looking into the Wednesday Delta III rocket failure said his team is focusing on the control system.

"Based on the data we reviewed over the past couple of days, it is pretty clear the failure is related to our control system," said Clarence Quan, Boeing investigation leader. At this time the team is turning its attention to the hardware and software which make up the system.

Yesterday, U.S. Air Force search teams flew over the impact area, 10-to-15 miles off the coast of Florida, and identified some debris from the vehicle. Boeing sent a salvage vessel out to the area today to pick up what is described as a dome section, and aluminum skins from the fuel tanks of the vehicle.

Quan said his team will have representation from the Department of Transportation, Hughes, Alliant Techsystems, U.S. Air Force Space and Missile Center, 45th Space Wing, NASA, retired experts with Delta experience and other commercial organizations. The team is divided into groups to focus on the first stage, graphite epoxy motors, second stage, fairing and upper stage, avionics, controls and guidance, and environments.

Boeing engineers and U. S. Air Force Safety personnel identified what was seen to be a fireball on the horizon after the vehicle destructed as the satellite. High-speed camera film showed the object as cube shaped, and the bright explosion lead experts to conclude it was caused by the storable propellants on board the satellite, and not a piece of solid rocket motor.

Boeing has postponed the next Delta II mission scheduled out of Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., while the investigation team ensures the issues surrounding the Delta III failure are not related to the Delta II program. The launch of five Iridium system satellites for Motorola had been scheduled for Sept. 1. Boeing continues to work with Motorola on a day-by-day basis to ensure that the launch takes place at the earliest time possible.

A playback of today's press conference is available for 24 hours by calling (888) 829-3347. No access code is required.

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