Boeing to Assemble and Test RS-68 Engines for Delta IV at Stennis

A landmark agreement reached earlier this year between The Boeing Company and NASA to conduct RS-68 rocket engine testing at NASA's John C. Stennis Space Center (SSC), has now been followed by an agreement with Mason Technologies, Inc. to locate a rocket engine final assembly facility at the Mississippi Army Ammunition Plant at SSC.

This arrangement will enable Boeing to assemble and test the RS-68 rocket engines for the Boeing Delta IV family of vehicles in close proximity at SSC, thus enhancing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the Boeing commitment to deliver reliable, high-performance, low-cost launch vehicles to their customers.

The agreement with Mason Technologies was signed on the same day that the Air Force announced that Boeing had been awarded 19 of 28 launches under the new evolved expendable launch program in a relationship worth almost $1.9 billion.

The earlier, unprecedented arrangement with NASA under the Commercial Space Act calls for Boeing to test the new RS-68 rocket engine for Delta IV at the B-1 test stand at SSC. Boeing is investing $8 million in the upgrade of that test stand to make it a dual test position with leading-edge test capabilities.

Boeing also announced this week that the company had reached an additional agreement with NASA to test other propulsion hardware for Delta IV at SSC. Boeing will begin testing the common booster core for Delta IV at the B-2 test stand upon completion of upgrades to that facility. Boeing will invest $8 million in modifications to the B-2 test stand, scheduled to begin in June 1999.

The three agreements regarding Delta IV assembly and test activities represent a long-term and continuing commitment by Boeing to the region and to SSC as the leading propulsion test center of excellence in the United States.

"We have had a long and beneficial partnership with the men and women of NASA at Stennis and we are looking forward to this significant expansion in our activities here," said Byron Wood, vice president and general manager for the Rocketdyne Propulsion & Power segment of The Boeing Company. "It is appropriate that this community should play such a major role in our continuing efforts to be the global leader in rocket propulsion during a new era of commercial activity in space. The synergy between Boeing and NASA at Stennis will contribute to the low-cost, high-value of the Delta IV program."

The RS-68 assembly facility will include approximately 90,000 square feet of assembly, warehouse and office space to accommodate the program. Boeing will invest $11 million in improvements and equipment at the Army facility (bringing the total Boeing investment in improvements and upgrades for assembly at the facility and test stands to $27 million.) Initially, the assembly and test operations are expected to provide approximately 80 technical and manufacturing jobs. In addition, the refurbishing and upgrade work on the test stand and assembly facility will provide several new construction jobs. This new activity represents a long-term commitment to SSC that will preserve high-quality, high-tech space jobs in south Mississippi.

Initial occupancy of the assembly facility is planned for the summer of 1999 with the first engine to be assembled in September 1999.

The RS-68 engine, being developed by Boeing Rocketdyne in Canoga Park, Calif., will be the first large liquid-fueled rocket engine developed in the United States in a generation. The RS-68 -- remarkable for its reduced cost and cycle time -- is an important element in the development of the Boeing Delta IV family of launch vehicles in its bid to meet the growing demand for commercial and government satellite launches.

Boeing and Rocketdyne have a long-standing working relationship with SSC. The inaugural rocket engine tests at SSC were on engines produced by Rocketdyne for the Apollo program. Testing of the Space Shuttle Main Engines (SSME), produced by Boeing at Canoga Park, Calif., has been conducted at Stennis since 1975 and will continue. In addition, testing activities at Stennis have begun on the Rocketdyne XRS-2200 linear aerospike engine for the NASA X-33 reusable launch vehicle.

"In essence, Boeing hardware testing will use three of the four large engine test facilities at Stennis," said Wood.

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