Sea Launch Assembles Review Board to Investigate Launch Failure

Late last week, Boeing received a Technical Assistance Agreement from the U.S. Department of State. This license enables the Sea Launch Failure Review Oversight Board to begin assessing the data and understanding the root cause of the March 12 launch failure.

Jim Maser, chief engineer at Sea Launch, will chair the Board. Maser is an aerospace engineer with extensive experience in program management, design and engineering leadership with the Boeing Delta and Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle programs.

"We will make every effort to study the flight and the problem in a thorough, methodical and disciplined manner," Maser said. "Our Board will have representatives from our customer companies as well as from the satellite and aerospace industries. We must have objective evidence that the root cause has been determined and corrected, with knowledgeable and confident concurrence from this team before we can return to flight."

Each of the Sea Launch partners is currently conducting an independent investigation. The Failure Review Oversight Board will review and verify the results of each investigation for concurrence on the root cause of the anomaly and the corrective action required. The work of the Board is expected to take several weeks. Once coming to closure, Maser will head up a return-to-flight activity. Sea Launch anticipates that activity will culminate in a launch this summer.

The Ukrainian partners at KB Yuzhnoye stated last week that the probable cause of the anomaly is related to a ground system software error that did not properly configure the propulsion system of the rocket's second stage prior to liftoff. While Sea Launch acknowledges the Ukrainian partner's expertise on the first two stages of the Zenit-3SL vehicle, the company cannot comment on this report until the Board reviews all of the findings.

Liftoff of the third flight of Sea Launch, carrying the ICO F-1 communications satellite, occurred during the first launch attempt at 6:49 a.m. (PST), March 12, from the equatorial launch site at 154 degrees West Longitude. An anomaly occurred during the second stage operation, prior to reaching orbital velocity. The ICO spacecraft did not reach orbit.

The satellite was to have been inserted into Medium Earth Orbit, about 6,000 miles (10,104 km) above the Earth. Hughes Space & Communications Company built the spacecraft for ICO Global Communications, based in London.

The extraordinary accuracy of the first launches in 1999 -- a demonstration launch in March and the first commercial launch in October -- proved the reliability of the Sea Launch system, the performance of the rocket and the teamwork of the international Sea Launch partnership. The Zenit-3SL rocket, tailored for Sea Launch to meet the program's performance and reliability objectives, is capable of delivering 5,250 kg to Geo Transfer Orbit. The current Sea Launch manifest stands at 18 confirmed launches.

The Sea Launch global partnership includes:

- Boeing Commercial Space Company of Kent, Wash. -- spacecraft integration and payload accommodations, and management of overall Home Port operations
- The Anglo-Norwegian Kvaerner Group of Oslo, Norway -- marine engineering and operations
- RSC Energia of Moscow, Russia -- Block-DM upper stage and its integration with the launch vehicle, Zenit-3SL, the automated support equipment and full-up operational testing
- KB Yuzhnoye/PO Yuzhmash of Ukraine -- Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Zenit-3SL

For additional information, visit the Sea Launch website at: www.sea-launch.com

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