Failure Review Board Closes in on Investigation Findings

The Sea Launch Failure Review Oversight Board, recently returned from a meeting in Moscow with the Sea Launch Russian and Ukrainian partners, is now completing its final report of findings and recommendations relating to the March 12 launch failure.

The Board received independent reports and presentations from the Sea Launch partners, as well as from representatives from a joint Russian and Ukrainian commission. This commission included 25 specialists representing key aerospace companies as well as the Russian and Ukrainian space agencies. They provided a full set of integrated findings and recommendations in a report that was signed by all the commission members as well as the presidents of SDO Yuzhnoye, PO Yuzhmash and RSC Energia. In response, Yuzhnoye and Energia created a joint action plan for implementation all of the recommendations cited.

During the course of the week in Moscow, April 24-28, several aspects of the presentations were particularly significant:

- First, it was apparent the investigations were thorough. All data presented supports earlier partner reports identifying the ground software logic error and associated lack of valve closure as the single credible failure scenario and root cause.
- Second, it was evident the joint commission, operating independently and objectively, concurred with the findings of the Energia and Yuzhnoye investigation teams.
- Finally, the recommendations go beyond the immediate root cause of the launch failure and address associated processes.

The partners are intent on executing these recommendations, which are designed to ensure this failure, or anything like it, does not occur again. Following closure of the failure investigation, Sea Launch will proceed with return-to-flight activities in preparation for a launch this summer.

The March 12 launch carried the ICO F-1 communications satellite but failed to reach orbital velocity. The anomaly, which occurred during the second stage operation, resulted in a termination of flight at approximately 8 minutes into the mission.

Sea Launch is an international launch services company based in Long Beach, Calif. Using a floating platform, one of two-ocean going vessels, Sea Launch lifts its Zenit-3SL rocket from a position on the equator at 154 degrees West Longitude. The Sea Launch partners include Boeing, RSC Energia, SDO Yuzhnoye/PO Yuzhmash and Kvaerner ASA. For more information, visit the Sea Launch web site .

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