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Early this morning, a Boeing [NYSE:BA] Delta II rocket climbed into the pre-dawn skies over Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., to send NASA's Aqua spacecraft on a mission to help improve life on Earth.

The launch occurred at approximately 2:55 a.m. PDT. One hour into flight, the rocket's second stage placed the Aqua spacecraft into a Sun-synchronous orbit.

The Boeing Delta II launch and deployment of Aqua paves the way for NASA scientists to gather data that can improve weather forecasting, enhance evacuation plans, and steer commercial and residential development away from storm tracks.

"Even with more than 190 successful NASA missions launched aboard Delta rockets since 1960, we continued our same level of vigilance in preparation for this launch as we have for all previous missions," said Rich Murphy, Boeing mission director. " Nothing must ever be taken for granted. That's the way it has to be if we expect to continue our success."

To accommodate the dimensions of the Aqua spacecraft, the Delta II used a new version of the 10-foot wide composite fairing, which features a three-foot longer cylindrical section to fit larger payloads.

Aqua is managed by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md. The spacecraft was assembled by TRW in Redondo, Beach, Calif. NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., NASA's Langley Research Center in Langley, Va., the National Space Development Agency of Japan, and Brazil's Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais contributed to the project by providing instruments aboard the spacecraft.

Boeing Space and Communications (S&C), headquartered in Seal Beach, Calif., is the world's largest space and communications company. A unit of The Boeing Company, S&C provides integrated solutions in launch services, human space flight and exploration, missile defense, and information and communications. It is NASA's largest contractor; a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense; and a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. The global enterprise has customers worldwide and manufacturing operations throughout the United States and Australia

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