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A Boeing [NYSE: BA] Delta II rocket is in the final preparation phase at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., for its Dec. 19 launch of two scientific satellites for NASA, ICESat and CHIPSat.

The Delta launch team successfully completed the Flight Readiness Review on Friday and will conduct the Launch Readiness Review on Wednesday, Dec. 18.

Scheduled for liftoff at 4:45 p.m. PST with a 45-minute launch window from Space Launch Complex 2W, a Delta II 7320-10 will deploy ICESat (Ice, Cloud and land Elevation Satellite) at one-hour and four minutes into flight, and CHIPSat (Cosmic Hot Interstellar Plasma Spectrometer Satellite) approximately 20 minutes later.

The ICESat/CHIPSat launch marks the third time a Delta II will carry two primary payloads aboard a single launch vehicle for NASA.

"Launching dual payloads is very challenging. There are many logistical and integration factors involved. But the experience and success that our Delta team has had in dual manifest launch services enables us to continue to offer this capability to our customers," said Jay Witzling, vice president and Delta deputy program manager

ICESat will study the Earth's ice sheet mass balance, climate and sea level; global distributions of clouds and aerosols and their effect on the Earth's atmosphere; and land topography, sea ice and vegetation cover.

CHIPSat will examine the million-degree gas in the Interstellar Medium -- the gas that fills the space between stars.

The launch comes on the heels of a NASA Launch Services contract extension awarded to Boeing for 12 firm Delta II missions with seven launch options that could carry the Delta II launch manifest through 2009 if all options are exercised.

The Delta II 7320-10 launch vehicle that will deploy the ICESat and CHIPSat satellites is a two-stage rocket that features a Boeing Rocketdyne RS-27A main engine; three Alliant Techsystems strap-on solid rocket boosters; an Aerojet AJ10-118K upper stage engine; a 10-foot diameter payload fairing, and the Reduced Height Dual Payload Attach Fitting unit developed by NASA in conjunction with Astrium, UK, that enables two unique payloads to be launched aboard a single launch vehicle.

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