

Boeing Completes Missile Defense Silo Modification Tests

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Boeing [NYSE: BA] has successfully tested modified underground silo and launch system components for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) interceptor, clearing the way for the silo to participate in a system flight test this summer.

The tests validated several silo modifications, including operation of the lateral support group -- the three "arms" that stabilize the interceptor inside the silo -- and the opening of the silo closure mechanism, or clamshell doors. The tests are part of a rigorous ground test protocol to ensure mission readiness before the actual GMD system flight test.

"This ground test milestone demonstrates reliability and repeatability of a 'test-as-you-fly' integrated system," said Scott Fancher, Boeing GMD vice president and program director. "The incremental and deliberate testing of each component as it is integrated into the system will ensure success when the system is called on to perform."

A series of six live-fire tests that trigger the synchronized launch sequence release of the lateral support group arms and the rapid opening of the clamshell doors was first conducted on the test silo in Huntsville, Ala., and then verified on a silo at the Ronald W. Reagan Missile Defense Site at Vandenberg Air Force Base (AFB), Calif.

The Ronald W. Reagan Missile Defense Site includes four silos currently housing two interceptor missiles that, when activated, will serve as part of the overall Ballistic Missile Defense System. The other two silos will be used for operationally realistic testing, but also can hold operational interceptors if required. Interceptors were not inside the silos undergoing tests.

The missile defense complex at Vandenberg AFB is one of two U.S. installations with long-range interceptor missiles. The other site at Fort Greely, Alaska, currently has nine interceptor missiles fielded with plans to emplace additional interceptors during the next three years. Silos at both sites will be retrofitted with the tested modifications.

Boeing is the prime contractor for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense system, the centerpiece of the Missile Defense Agency's overall layered ballistic missile defense architecture. Industry partners include Raytheon, Orbital Sciences Corp., Bechtel and Northrop Grumman.

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For further information:

Marc Selinger

The Boeing Company

office: (703) 414-6138

marc.selinger@boeing.com

Linda James

The Boeing Company
office: (256) 462-3101
linda.s.james@boeing.com
