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EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif., May 20, 2010-- The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] announced today that the X-51A WaveRider will make its first hypersonic flight test attempt from Edwards Air Force Base on Tuesday, May 25. The unmanned aerial vehicle will be released from a B-52 bomber off the southern California coast.

The X-51A is expected to fly autonomously for five minutes -- powered by a supersonic combustion ramjet (scramjet) motor -- accelerate to about Mach 6 and transmit large amounts of data to ground stations before it splashes down into the Pacific and breaks up, as planned. There are no plans to recover the flight test vehicle, one of four built.

"In those 300 seconds, we hope to learn more about hypersonic flight with a practical scramjet engine than all previous flight tests combined," said Charlie Brink, X-51A program manager with the Air Force Research Laboratory's Propulsion Directorate at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The longest previous hypersonic scramjet flight test, performed by a NASA X-43 in 2004, was faster, but lasted only about 10 seconds and used less logistically supportable hydrogen fuel.

The X-51A program is a collaborative effort of the Air Force Research Laboratory and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, with industry partners The Boeing Company and Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne.

The May 25 attempt will be the only hypersonic flight attempt this fiscal year, a change from the original test plan, which was to fly once in December 2009 and three more times in 2010. A combination of factors, including high demand for flight-test and range assets such as the B-52, contributed to the pause.

"This is an experimental X-plane and it's a complicated test. We knew the original schedule was aggressive and we would need to be flexible," said Brink. "It's also expensive to keep a staff of engineers and support staff at the ready and then not be able to fly when supporting assets aren't available. So we elected to make only one hypersonic try this spring and then pause for a few months to conserve funding."

Alex Lopez, Boeing vice president of Advanced Network & Space Systems, said the X-51A program will pave the way to hypersonic weapons and future access to space.

"This is been a major team effort for the past seven years," said Lopez. "If the test flight meets even a subset of our expectations, the leap in engine technology will be the equivalent to the post-World War II leap from propellers to jet engines. It will be a historic event."

A unit of The Boeing Company, Boeing Defense, Space & Security is one of the world's largest defense, space and security businesses specializing in innovative and capabilities-driven customer solutions, and the world's largest and most versatile manufacturer of military aircraft. Headquartered in St. Louis, Boeing Defense, Space & Security is a $34 billion business with 68,000 employees worldwide.

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NOTE TO NEWS MEDIA: The X-51A flight test at Edwards is not open to news media. Boeing and the Air Force will publish a release, still and video imagery following the test and post on www.af.mil and www.dvidshub.net. Broadcast-quality interviews with program-affiliated personnel, X-51 b-roll video and animation are already available at www.dvidshub.net.

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