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Air Force Research Lab takes a significant step toward reusable, responsive space launch system

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif., Dec. 7, 2011 -- The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] has received a \$2 million contract from the U.S. Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) to define requirements and design concepts for the Reusable Booster System (RBS) Flight and Ground Experiments program. This program will enhance space launch capability by providing a reliable, responsive and cost-effective system.

Boeing will begin work immediately on the requirements and concepts for the RBS demonstration vehicle, called RBS Pathfinder, at the company's Huntington Beach facility. Under the indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract, three teams will compete for a follow-on task order to develop the vehicle and conduct a flight test.

"Boeing looks forward to sharing our extensive background in the development of launch systems and reusable space vehicles with the Air Force," said Steve Johnston, director of Boeing Phantom Works' Advanced Space Exploration division. "As we create advanced concepts for this next-generation launch system, we'll have opportunities to apply many lessons learned from our past successes."

RBS Pathfinder will be designed to autonomously fly back to the launch site after upper-stage separation using an innovative method, called rocket-back, that manages the booster's energy and flight path.

"The Pathfinder design will allow it to land horizontally on a specified landing strip," said Will Hampton, Boeing RBS program manager.

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