

Report: Weather satellite project lagging

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U.S. officials seven years ago unveiled plans to launch a series of satellites to provide more accurate weather forecasts -- but it hasn't happened yet.

The trouble-plagued and over budget program now isn't expected to launch any satellites until 2013 at the earliest, ABC News reported.

The aim was to provide more accurate weather data by placing several satellites into North and South Pole orbits, providing earlier forecasts of El Niño conditions, tsunamis and other weather phenomena.

But ABC says the project is now five years behind schedule and reportedly \$5 billion over budget.

Rep. Dana Rohrbacher, R-Calif., said: "This is not just mismanagement. This is a catastrophe."

Part of the problem is the satellite sensors that would detect atmospheric conditions have never worked properly in tests. Despite that, the project's main contractor, the Northrop Grumman Corp, has been paid \$123 million in performance bonuses, ABC said.

That has perplexed Johnny Frazier, the inspector general of the U.S. Department of Commerce: "If I give you 84 percent of the fee when you have a horrible track record, what incentive do you have to try and do better? I think almost none."

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