

NASA launches suborbital rockets from Virginia

March 27 2012



Image: NASA

Milky white chemical clouds were briefly visible in much of the night sky along the Eastern seaboard on Tuesday after NASA launched a series of rockets to study the jet stream at the edge of the earth's atmosphere.

The five sounding rockets began blasting off just before 5 a.m. from NASA's Wallops Island facility on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Each of the rockets was fired about 80 seconds apart and released a chemical cloud so that scientists could 'see' little-understood winds about 65 miles above the earth's surface. Firing multiple rockets allows scientists to track the high-speed winds over hundreds of miles.

NASA said it received reports that the chemical clouds were visible as

far south as Wilmington, N.C.; west to Charleston, W.Va.; and north to Buffalo, N.Y. The clouds were also visible above major metropolitan areas like Washington and New York.

The winds NASA is studying travel at speeds of up to 300 miles per hour in an area of the atmosphere where there are strong electrical currents.



In this photo provided by NASA, a sounding rocket launches from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in Wallops Island, Va., Tuesday, March 27, 2012, as part of the Anomalous Transport Rocket Experiment (ATREX). Five rockets were launched from the site before dawn Tuesday for the ATREX mission to help scientists understand the upper level jet stream, which is located 60 to 65 miles above Earth's surface. (AP Photo/NASA)

Data gathered from the experiment should allow scientists to better model the electromagnetic regions of space that can damage satellites and affect radio communications.

Scientists also hope the experiment will help explain how atmospheric disturbances in one part of the globe can be transported to other parts of

the globe in a day or two.

NASA had been trying to launch the rockets since March 14, but had a series of delays due to bad weather. NASA needed skies to be clear in Virginia as well as coastal North Carolina and New Jersey, where the space agency had cameras set up to capture images of the clouds.

More information: <http://www.nasa.gov/mission-pages/sunearth/missions/atrex-nightlight.html>

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