

SpaceX is considering coastal Texas town for rocket launch site

April 12 2012, By W.J. Hennigan

Expansion-minded rocket venture Space Exploration Technologies Corp. may add a small Texas town on the Gulf of Mexico to its list of rocket launch sites.

The Hawthorne, Calif., company, better known as SpaceX, filed a document with the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) saying it was taking its first steps toward establishing a launch pad in Cameron County, Texas.

SpaceX already has a launch pad in Cape Canaveral, Fla., and is building a launch site at Vandenberg Air Force Base, northwest of Santa Barbara, Calif.

Company spokeswoman Kirstin Brost Grantham said SpaceX is considering multiple potential locations around the country for a new commercial launch pad. The area near Brownsville, Texas, along the coast, is a possibility, she said.

"There is a long way to go before this could happen," Grantham said.

Texas has long been associated with the nation's [space](#) program because of the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston. But that's the mission control center, not a [rocket launch](#) site.

Only four U.S. states - Virginia, California, Alaska and Florida - have active launch sites.

The new document, which became public Tuesday, declared that SpaceX was preparing an environmental report for a possible [launch pad](#) and added that the company was gauging public opinion.

"SpaceX proposes to construct a vertical launch area and a control center area to support up to 12 commercial launches per year," the document said.

Gilberto Salinas, executive vice president of the Brownsville Economic Development Council, said that as a city in the southern tip of Texas, Brownsville was ideal for rocket launches.

He added that in the early days of NASA, Brownsville was considered as a possible center for [space operations](#) before officials settled on Cape Canaveral. "All these years later, we're glad to be looked at again," Salinas said.

SpaceX builds its Falcon 9 rockets and Dragon capsules in a vast complex in Hawthorne where fuselage sections for Boeing's 747 jumbo jets were once built.

The company also has a rocket-testing facility in McGregor, Texas. To date, SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket and Dragon capsule have had two successful test launches from Cape Canaveral.

On April 30, SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket and unmanned capsule are scheduled to lift off from Cape Canaveral into space, where the Dragon will dock with the International Space Station in a demonstration for NASA. If it's successful, [SpaceX](#) would be the first private company to dock with the station.

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