

NASA launches communication satellite

January 31 2013, by Marcia Dunn

NASA launched a new communication satellite Wednesday to stay in touch with its space station astronauts and relay more Hubble telescope images.

An unmanned Atlas V rocket blasted into the starry night sky carrying the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite.

This is the 11th TDRS satellite to be launched by [NASA](#). The space agency uses the orbiting network to communicate with astronauts living on the [International Space Station](#).

The first TDRS spacecraft flew in 1983; it recently was retired along with No. 4. The second was lost aboard space shuttle Challenger in 1986; Monday marked the 27th anniversary of the [launch](#) disaster.

This newest third-generation TDRS carries the letter K designation. Once it begins working, it will become TDRS-11. It will take two weeks for the satellite to reach its intended 22,300-mile-high orbit. Testing will last a few months.

NASA estimates the satellite costs between \$350 million and \$400 million.

Another TDRS spacecraft, L in the series, will be launched next year.

NASA wants at least seven TDRS satellites working in orbit at any one time. The one launched Wednesday will make eight.

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