

US launches Earth observation satellite (Update)

February 11 2013



A launch pad tower is rolled back to reveal the Atlas-V rocket with Landsat Data Continuity Mission spacecraft on February 11, 2013, at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. The United States launched its latest Earth observation satellite Monday.

The United States launched its latest Earth observation satellite Monday atop an Atlas V rocket from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, NASA said.

The Landsat Data Continuity Mission was the latest in a line of satellites used to continuously gather imagery from space of the Earth's land surface, coastal areas and coral reefs.

"Everything is looking good, and the engine is operating normally," a NASA announcer said after the rocket roared off its launch pad at 1702 GMT.

Once in orbit, the satellite will be turned over to the US Geological Survey.

The satellite is the eighth in a series to be launched beginning in 1972, that have been instrumental in tracking the changing face of planet.

It is designed to have a minimum five year life span, although it is fueled for a 10 year run in space, orbiting the Earth about 14 times a day from an altitude of 438 miles (705 kilometers).

Its powerful sensors will gather 400 "screens" of the planet a day and relay them for storage in ground base archives where they can be accessed by anyone.

The accumulated data allows specific sites to be compared over periods of months, years or decades, providing what NASA says is "the longest record of the Earth's continental surfaces as seen from space."

NASA scientists say the sensors aboard the latest spacecraft, which joins the Landsat 7 satellite, will allow for observations that are more sensitive to change in the landscape over time.

"USGS's policy of offering free and open access to the phenomenal 40-year Landsat data record will continue to give the United States and global research community a better understanding of the changes

occurring on our planet," said Michael Freilich, director of NASA's Earth Science Division.

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