

# Orbital Sciences about to make first space station run

September 17 2013, by Marcia Dunn

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The Orbital Sciences Corporation Antares rocket, with its Cygnus cargo spacecraft aboard, is seen at sunrise Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013 on the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport (MARS) Pad-0A at the NASA Wallops Flight Facility, in Wallops Island, Va. NASA's commercial space partner, Orbital Sciences Corporation, is targeting a Sept. 18 launch for its demonstration cargo resupply mission to the International Space Station. (AP Photo/NASA, Bill Ingalls)

A Virginia company is all set to make its first-ever supply run to the International Space Station.

On the eve of its premiere rendezvous mission, Orbital Sciences Corp. said everything looked good for Wednesday's launch from Virginia's Eastern Shore.

An unmanned Antares rocket was scheduled to blast off from NASA's Wallops Island Facility at 10:50 a.m. EDT, carrying 1,300 pounds (590 kilograms) of food, clothes and other items as part of a test flight. A Sunday delivery is planned.

A launch demo of the rocket in April went well.

If this latest mission succeeds, Orbital Sciences will start launching more Cygnus [cargo ships](#) under a \$1.9 billion contract with NASA. The commercial effort began more than five years ago.

The California-based SpaceX already is shipping goods from Cape Canaveral, Florida, under a separate \$1.6 billion contract. Its first trip was in May last year.

Formally known as Space Exploration Technologies Corp., the company founded by billionaire Elon Musk of PayPal fame has the only unmanned vessel capable of returning [space station](#) items to Earth. The SpaceX Dragon parachutes into the Pacific off the Southern California coast.



Kurt Eberly, right, Orbital's Antares Deputy Program Manager explains the AJ 26-62 aerojet to a group of media representatives at NASA Wallops Flight Facility on Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The jet will be part of the next Antares launch vehicle now being constructed at Wallops Island, Va. NASA hopes to launch a completed Antares rocket, which will send cargo to the International Space Station, on Wednesday morning. (AP Photo/Eastern Shore News, Jay Diem)

The smaller Cygnus capsule will be filled with space station trash following its monthlong visit and burn up upon descent. That's the same fate as the Russian, European and Japanese supply ships.



Orbital Sciences Corp. Antares rocket is being readied by workers on the launchpad at the NASA Wallops Island test flight facility in Wallops Island, Va., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The unmanned Antares rocket is scheduled to blast off Wednesday morning and will carry 1,300 pounds of food, clothes and other items to the Internaional Space Station as part of this test flight. (AP Photo/Steve Helber)

NASA is looking to private U.S. industry to keep the space station stocked in the post-shuttle era. It's also putting seed money into SpaceX and other companies for development of a manned capsule. That's still years away, so NASA will continue to buy rides for its astronauts on

Russian rockets. One American will be aboard the Soyuz capsule due to take off next week from Kazakhstan, along with two Russians. The trio will double the station population to its normal six.

Wallops was in the spotlight earlier this month. On Sept. 6, NASA launched a [robotic explorer](#), named LADEE, to the moon. It's still en route. Orbital Sciences provided the Minotaur V rocket used in the moonshot, which was widely seen in the night sky along the East Coast. Wednesday's daytime launch won't be nearly as visible.



In a photo provided by NASA, the Orbital Sciences Corporation Antares rocket, with its Cygnus cargo spacecraft aboard, is seen at the NASA Wallops Flight Facility, Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013, in Wallops Island, Va. NASA's commercial

space partner, Orbital Sciences Corporation, is targeting a Sept. 18 launch for its demonstration cargo resupply mission to the International Space Station. (AP Photo/Bill Ingalls)

Frank Culbertson, the company's executive vice president and a former space shuttle commander, said Tuesday that the excitement level is high.



Orbital Sciences Corp. Antares rocket is being readied on the launchpad at the NASA Wallops Island test flight facility in Wallops Island, Va., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The unmanned Antares rocket is scheduled to blast off Wednesday morning and will carry 1,300 pounds of food, clothes and other items to the space station as part of this test flight. (AP Photo/Steve Helber)

"This is one of the most exciting things that is happening in the middle of a very exciting month for Orbital, for NASA and for space programs

around the world," Culbertson said at a news conference, referring to all the various launches and re-entries.

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