

Cygnus cargo craft readies to leave space station

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This photo courtesy of NASA shows the Orbital Sciences Corporation Antares rocket, with the Cygnus cargo spacecraft aboard, as it launches on September 18, 2013, NASA Wallops Flight Facility, Virginia

A private cargo ship built by Orbital Sciences Corporation is preparing to leave the International Space Station early Tuesday and burn up on re-entry into Earth's atmosphere, NASA said Monday.

The Cygnus spacecraft is scheduled to detach from the orbiting research outpost at 1000 GMT Tuesday and leave the ISS an hour and a half later.

"Orbital engineers then will conduct a series of planned burns and maneuvers to move Cygnus toward a destructive re-entry in Earth's atmosphere," NASA said in a statement.

Orbital said Cygnus is expected to re-enter the atmosphere on Wednesday, October 23 at 1818 GMT over the Pacific Ocean east of New Zealand.

The unmanned spaceship attached itself to the ISS on September 29, marking the first successful demonstration mission of a cargo resupply flight by Orbital Sciences.

It is the fourth such mission by a private company to ferry supplies to global astronauts, a capacity the United States lost when the [space shuttle program](#) ended in 2011.

The California-based SpaceX, owned by entrepreneur Elon Musk, in 2012 became the first private enterprise to send its own cargo-bearing spacecraft to the ISS and back.

Both companies have billion-dollar NASA contracts to deliver cargo to the ISS on multiple missions over the coming years.

Unlike SpaceX's Dragon capsule, Cygnus cannot return to Earth intact and will be destroyed after its mission is complete.

NASA said astronauts aboard the ISS have loaded Cygnus "with items no longer needed," which will burn up with the spacecraft when it plunges back to Earth.

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