

Space station grocery run stalled by storm clouds

April 13 2015, by Marcia Dunn



The Falcon 9 SpaceX rocket stands ready for launch at Complex 40 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Monday, April 13, 2015. The rocket, scheduled to launch later Monday, is filled with more than 4,300 pounds of supplies and payloads, including critical materials to directly support research at the International Space Station. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

SpaceX will have to wait another day to deliver groceries and an espresso maker to the International Space Station.

Fast-approaching storm clouds prevented the unmanned rocket from blasting off Monday afternoon. The company will try again Tuesday afternoon, but more bad weather is forecast. The odds of acceptable conditions are just 50-50.

SpaceX halted the countdown at the 2½-minute mark as a menacing storm system moved into the 11-mile (17.7-kilometer) keep-out zone surrounding the Falcon rocket. The company had a single second to get off the ground.

"We were in a race, but we didn't quite make it today," a SpaceX launch commentator said.

The SpaceX supply ship holds more than 4,000 pounds (1,815 kilograms) of food, experiments and equipment. Italy provided the specially designed espresso machine for Italian astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti, who arrived at the space station last November.

The espresso maker was supposed to fly in January, but ended up on backlog following another company's launch explosion last year. That accident left the space station's pantry a little emptier than NASA would prefer. The space agency is trying to get back to a six-month reserve on food.

Once the cargo ship flies, SpaceX will try to land the leftover booster on an ocean barge. It will be the third such landing attempt for the California company led by billionaire Elon Musk. SpaceX aims to reuse the first-stage boosters that are normally thrown away, to make spaceflight more affordable.



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Musk said via Twitter on Monday that he was holding the odds of a successful rocket landing at less than 50 percent. On Sunday, one of his top officers put the odds at 75 percent to possibly 80 percent.

The company failed in January on its first effort to fly a first-stage booster to a platform floating off Florida's east coast and land it vertically. The booster's steering system ran out of hydraulic fluid, and the booster hit too hard and fell off in a fiery explosion. Rough seas forced the February attempt to be called off at the last minute. Sea conditions were much better Monday, and the platform was tweaked in the meantime to be more stable.

The platform is dubbed "Just Read the Instructions." It will remain on location in the Atlantic, off Jacksonville.



Photographers set up remote cameras to record the launch of the Falcon 9 SpaceX rocket at Complex 40 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Monday, April 13, 2015. The rocket, scheduled to launch later Monday, is filled with more than 4,300 pounds of supplies and payloads, including critical materials to directly support research at the International Space Station. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

Musk's company would be the first to accomplish this.

"The implications are huge and, of course, in the long term this might change completely how we approach transportation to space," said Hans Koenigsmann, vice president for mission assurance.

Tuesday's launch time is 4:10 p.m.



This undated product image made from video provided by Lavazza shows a prototype of Lavazza and Argotec's "ISSpresso" machine. The final version will be the first real Italian espresso machine on The International Space Station. On Monday, April 13, 2015, a version of the coffee maker is scheduled for launch to the International Space Station aboard a supply capsule. (AP Photo/Lavazza)



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More information: SpaceX: www.spacex.com/

NASA: www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station

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