

Virgin Orbit determines cause of rocket launch failure

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Virgin Orbit said Monday it has determined what caused the failure of its debut rocket launch and is working toward a second flight that will carry small satellites for NASA.

The Long Beach, California, company founded by Richard Branson, experienced a premature shutdown of its main rocket engine on Memorial Day moments after the launch vehicle was released from beneath the wing of a modified Boeing 747 off the Southern California coast.

The investigation determined there was a breach in a high-pressure line carrying cryogenic liquid oxygen to the first-stage combustion chamber. The engine soon stopped providing thrust and the demonstration launch ended, the company said.

"Now, we're putting the finishing touches on that investigation; and while we aren't quite done, the major findings and the corrective actions are clear—and we're well under way with fabricating new parts and putting those actions into play," the company said.

Virgin Orbit had planned to use its next rocket for a second demonstration flight but NASA determined the company should proceed with launch of 11 small satellites for the space agency's CubeSat Launch Initiative.

A date for the launch has not been set.

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