

# These tech firms live-track this year's 'fastest-ever' Santa with NORAD data

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With the world population topping eight billion for the first time, "Santa is flying faster than ever; we estimate he's traveling over Mach 7 this

year"—seven times the speed of sound, more than a mile per second—"to hit all those datapoints around the world in one night," says Adam Gorski, aerospace engineer for Exton, Pennsylvania-based Ansys Government Initiatives.

AGI, a flight-simulation subsidiary of Ansys Inc., is one of two Philadelphia-area tech companies that cooperate to track Santa Claus' Christmas Eve flights in real time, using data collected by NORAD, the U.S.-Canadian North American Aerospace Defense Command.

NORAD collects data from transmitters in many places, including a convenient Santa Claus sled beacon—"Rudolph's red nose," Gorski added.

"Anything that fast is hypersonic—you see it, long before you hear it. You need special technology to go that fast," the kind that propels satellites into orbit but doesn't yet power commercial aircraft, he added.

"Also, magic reindeer. They go that fast."

A sister company, Center City-based Cesium, builds the user-friendly dashboard software that makes Santa easier to track, along with systems used by gamers and other participants in the emerging virtual-reality networks known as the metaverse.

Since the 1960s, NORAD has tracked planes, satellites, and other flying objects over North America, and made the data publicly available, making it easier for flight planners to avoid accidents and improve air traffic safety.

There are Grinches who object. Twitter owner Elon Musk earlier this month suspended social media users, including some journalists, who provided similar information from public sources that tracked his and

other billionaires' private jets around the world.

Musk said he had safety concerns, that the data might be used by those who wish to harm him and other high-profile people; critics accused him of muzzling them and compromising his own promises to lessen restrictions on the circulation of information.

Despite Musk's cancellations, NORAD and its Philly tech partners have continued to post their Santa Claus tracking data, through the NoradSantaNews.com website (with links in a few languages), YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn—and also @NoradTracksSanta, on Musk's Twitter network.

Ansys says the sites it services that provide Santa tracking information received more than 20 million visits last year, and that traffic has risen each year.

Both Ansys' Exton unit—it was the private company Analytical Graphics Inc. before Pittsburgh-based military contractor Ansys bought for \$700 million it in 2020—and Cesium were founded by engineer Paul Graziani and his colleagues, who left what was then GE Aerospace in King of Prussia in 1990 to start a series of space technology businesses.

NORAD began tracking Santa in 1965, after a Colorado newspaper accidentally printed its headquarters' [phone number](#) in place of a department store's call-Santa line, and NORAD volunteers began answering the resulting flood of calls. Ansys began aiding the effort 25 years ago; the business now known as Cesium signed on in 2012.

I asked Gorski about Musk's concern: Don't his company and NORAD worry all that information about Santa's location might be abused to compromise security? What if bad actors plot Santa's course and attempt to rob the sleigh, or wreck the gift-giving operation?

"His only defense is reindeer antlers, and the ability to move really fast," Gorski acknowledged.

But Santa has many friends and able defenders watching out for him, he concluded: "NORAD reports that our Navy jets check on Santa, tipping their wings as he goes past."

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