

Virgin Orbit reports 'anomaly' in satellite launch from UK

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Virgin Atlantic Cosmic Girl, a repurposed Virgin Atlantic Boeing 747 aircraft carrying a rocket, is parked at Spaceport Cornwall, at Cornwall Airport in Newquay, England, Monday, Jan. 9, 2023. Engineers are making final preparations for the first satellite launch from the U.K. later Monday, when a repurposed passenger plane is expected to release a Virgin Orbit rocket carrying several small satellites into space. Credit: Ben Birchall/PA via AP

A mission to launch the first satellites into orbit from Western Europe suffered an "anomaly" Tuesday, Virgin Orbit said.

The U.S.-based company attempted its first international launch on Monday, using a modified jumbo jet to carry one of its rockets from Cornwall in southwestern England to the Atlantic Ocean where the rocket was released. The rocket was supposed to take nine [small satellites](#) for mixed civil and defense use into orbit.

But about two hours after the plane took off, the company reported that the mission encountered a problem.

"We appear to have an anomaly that has prevented us from reaching orbit. We are evaluating the information," Virgin Orbit said on Twitter.

Virgin Orbit, which is listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange, was founded by British billionaire Richard Branson. It has previously completed four similar launches from California.

Hundreds gathered for the launch cheered earlier as a repurposed Virgin Atlantic Boeing 747 aircraft, named "Cosmic Girl," took off from Cornwall late Monday. Around an hour into the flight, the plane released the rocket at around 35,000 feet (around 10,000 meters) over the Atlantic Ocean to the south of Ireland.



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In this undated photo provided by Virgin Orbit on Monday, Jan. 9, 2023, Virgin Atlantic Cosmic Girl, a repurposed Virgin Atlantic Boeing 747 aircraft that will carry a rocket, is parked at Spaceport Cornwall, at Cornwall Airport in Newquay, England. Engineers are making final preparations for the first satellite launch from the U.K. later Monday, when a repurposed passenger plane is expected to release a Virgin Orbit rocket carrying several small satellites into space. Credit: Virgin Orbit via AP



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This undated photo provided by Virgin Orbit on Monday, Jan. 9, 2023, shows the LauncherOne rocket in a hanger at Spaceport Cornwall, at Cornwall Airport in Newquay, England. Engineers are making final preparations for the first satellite launch from the U.K. later Monday, when a repurposed passenger plane is expected to release a Virgin Orbit rocket carrying several small satellites into space. Credit: Virgin Orbit via AP



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The plane, piloted by a Royal Air Force pilot, returned to Cornwall after releasing the rocket.

Some of the satellites are meant for U.K. defense monitoring, while others are for businesses such as those working in navigational technology. One Welsh company is looking to manufacture materials such as [electronic components](#) in space.

U.K. officials had high hopes for the mission. Ian Annett, deputy [chief executive](#) at the U.K. Space Agency, said Monday it marked a "new era" for his country's space industry. There was strong market demand for small satellite launches, Annett said, and the U.K. has ambitions to be "the hub of European launches."

In the past, satellites produced in the U.K. had to be sent to spaceports in other countries to make their journey into space.

The mission was a collaboration between the U.K. Space Agency, the Royal Air Force, Virgin Orbit and Cornwall Council.

The launch was originally planned for late last year, but it was postponed because of technical and regulatory issues.

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