

Virgin Orbit pausing all work, reportedly furloughs staff

March 16 2023, by Sylvia Hui



This undated photo provided by the UK Space Agency on Thursday March 16, 2023, the Virgin Orbit's LauncherOne rocket at Spaceport Cornwall, at Cornwall Airport in Newquay, England. Virgin Orbit said Thursday March 16, 2023 it is pausing all operations amid reports that the company is furloughing almost all its staff as part of a bid to seek a funding lifeline. Credit: UK Space Agency via AP

Virgin Orbit said Thursday it is pausing all operations amid reports that the company is furloughing almost all its staff as part of a bid to seek a funding lifeline.

The California-based satellite launch company confirmed it's putting all work on hold, but didn't say how long for.

"Virgin Orbit is initiating a company-wide operational pause, effective March 16, 2023, and anticipates providing an update on go-forward operations in the coming weeks," the company said in a statement.

It said the move was "to conserve cash while the company continues to evaluate all available options."

The company declined to comment on reports that all but a small number of workers will be temporarily put on unpaid furlough.

Virgin Orbit, which is listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange, was founded in 2017 by British billionaire Richard Branson to target the market for launching small satellites into space. Its LauncherOne rockets are launched from the air from modified Virgin passenger planes, allowing the company to operate more flexibly than using fixed launch sites.

In January, [a mission](#) by Virgin Orbit to launch the first satellites into [orbit](#) from Europe failed after its rocket's upper stage prematurely shut down. The failure was a disappointment for Virgin Orbit and British space officials, who had high hopes that the launch, which took off from Cornwall in southwest England, would mark the beginning of more commercial opportunities for the U.K. space industry.



A repurposed Virgin Atlantic Boeing 747 aircraft, named Cosmic Girl, carrying Virgin Orbit's LauncherOne rocket, takes off from Spaceport Cornwall at Cornwall Airport, Newquay, England, on Jan. 9, 2023. Virgin Orbit said Thursday March 16, 2023 it is pausing all operations amid reports that the company is furloughing almost all its staff as part of a bid to seek a funding lifeline. Credit: Ben Birchall/PA via AP

The company said last month that an investigation found that its rocket's fuel filter had become dislodged, causing an engine to become overheated and other components to malfunction. The nine [small satellites](#) it carried fell back to Earth and landed in the Atlantic Ocean.

"Our investigation is nearly complete and our next production rocket with the needed modification incorporated is in final stages of

integration and test," Virgin Orbit said in its statement Thursday.

The [company](#) has said that its next launch will take place from the Mojave Air and Space Port in California for a commercial customer. It hasn't provided a date.

Virgin Orbit has completed four successful [satellite](#) launches so far from California for a mix of commercial and U.S. government defense uses. Other than the U.K., it also has ambitions to expand its operations to mainland Europe and South Korea.

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