

Virgin Galactic grounds space tourism flight after piece of ship accidentally detaches

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Credit: Virgin Galactic

Virgin Galactic has grounded its current space tourism flight after a small part of its mothership unintentionally detached, the company announced Monday.

The safety of the mission was not impacted, and the discovery of the lost part, known as an 'alignment pin,' was found during routine checks "in accordance with regulations," the company said in a statement.

Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic has been offering space tourism missions since August 2023. The now-grounded [flight](#) was the company's first of 2024 and had taken off on Jan. 26, reports CNN.

Virgin Galactic said it reported the issue to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on Wednesday and that it plans to work with the FAA on a review of the issue.

The FAA said it plans to carry out a "mishap investigation" and added that it "must approve Virgin Galactic's final report, including the corrective actions" before the company resumes flight activity.

"A return to flight is based on the FAA determining that any system, process, or procedure related to the mishap does not affect [public safety](#)," the statement added. "In addition, Virgin Galactic must request and receive approval from the FAA to modify its license that incorporates the corrective actions and meets all other licensing requirements."

The alignment pin that was lost is designed to "ensure the spaceship is aligned to the mothership when mating the vehicles on the ground during pre-flight procedures," the company said.

It's normally located on the underside of the VMS Eve carrier jet or 'mothership,' a twin-fuselage plane that carries the space plane to [high altitudes](#) before it's released and launches into space.

Virgin Galactic did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the incident. The company noted in its statement Monday that there was no damage done to either the [spaceship](#) or the mothership due to the lost

pin.

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