

NASA, NOAA set to launch new environmental satellite

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NASA is set to launch the new National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite (POES), another critical link in the development of a global Earth-observation program.

The spacecraft, NOAA-N, will lift off at 6:22 a.m. EDT, May 11, 2005, from Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif.

"The NOAA-N satellite is key to establishing a strong Global Earth Observation System of Systems, because it will strengthen our understanding about what the environment around the world is doing, not just here in the U.S.," said Gregory Withee, assistant administrator for NOAA's Satellite and Information Service. "From monitoring the ash clouds of Mount St. Helens, to bolstering the U.S. search and rescue network, NOAA-N will be the link in our continued success," he added.

NOAA-N will replace NOAA-16, in operation since September 2000, and join NOAA-17, launched in June 2002. Once in orbit, NOAA-N will be renamed NOAA-18. NOAA maintains a constellation of two primary polar-orbiting satellites. The global data from these satellites are used extensively in NOAA's weather and climate prediction models.

"NASA is proud of our role in building and launching these satellites which contribute to NOAA's vital mission of providing weather forecasts and collecting environmental data about the Earth," said Karen Halterman, NASA POES Project Manager, Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Md.

As it orbits the globe, NOAA-N will collect data about the Earth's surface and atmosphere that are input for NOAA's long-range climate and seasonal outlooks, including forecasts for El Nino and La Nina.

NOAA-N also has instruments used in the international Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking System, called COSPAS-SARSAT, which was established in 1982. NOAA polar-orbiting satellites detect emergency beacon distress signals and relay their location to ground stations, so rescue can be dispatched. SARSAT is credited with saving approximately 5,000 lives in the U.S. and more than 18,000 worldwide.

NOAA-N is the fifteenth in a series of polar-orbiting satellites dating back to 1978. NOAA-N has imaging and sounding capabilities that are broadcast around the world and recorded on board for playback over NOAA ground stations. There is one more satellite in this series scheduled for launch in December 2007.

NOAA's next generation of polar spacecraft, the National Polar-Orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS), is planned for launch in early 2010. NPOESS is a combined program with NOAA, the Department of Defense and NASA.

NOAA manages the POES program and establishes requirements, provides all funding and distributes environmental satellite data for the United States. NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center procures and manages the development and launch of the satellites for NOAA on a cost-reimbursable basis.

Twenty-one days after the satellite is launched, NASA will transfer operational control to NOAA. NASA's comprehensive on-orbit verification period is expected to last approximately 45 days after launch.

Source: NASA

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