Nation's Newest USAF Weather Satellite Delivered To Launch Site

The Defense Meteorological Satellite Program (DMSP) F-18 Block 5D-3 spacecraft, built under contract for the U.S. Air Force by Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company, Sunnyvale, Calif., has been delivered to Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., in preparation for a July 2008 launch.

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20071214/AQF051)

"We're proud to have our third Block 5D-3 spacecraft at the launch site," said Sue Stretch, Lockheed Martin DMSP program director. "Our partnership with the Air Force dates to the very beginning of the DMSP program with a common goal of ensuring that commanders have access to environmental data critical to the preparation and execution of military operations."

The Block 5D-3 series accommodates larger sensor payloads than earlier generations. They also feature a larger capability power subsystem; a more powerful on-board computer with increased memory -- allowing greater spacecraft autonomy -- and increased battery capacity that extends the mean mission duration.

DMSP is used for strategic and tactical weather prediction to aid the U.S. military in planning operations at sea, on land and in the air. Equipped with a sophisticated sensor suite that can image visible and infrared cloud cover, the satellite collects specialized meteorological, oceanographic, and solar-geophysical information in all weather conditions. The DMSP constellation comprises two spacecraft in near-polar orbits, C3 (command, control and communications), user terminals and weather centers. The most recent launch of a DMSP spacecraft took place on November 4, 2006 from Vandenberg Air Force Base. That launch marked the second of the Block 5D-3 satellites.

Including F-18, three DMSP satellites remain to be launched. Those not at Vandenberg being prepared for launch are maintained at Space Systems' operations in Sunnyvale, Calif. for storage, functional testing and upgrading. The spacecraft are shipped to Vandenberg for launch when requested by the Air Force.

Since 1965, 44 Lockheed Martin DMSP satellites have been launched successfully by the U.S. Air Force. Now in its fourth decade of service, the DMSP has proven itself to be a valuable tool in scheduling and protecting military operations on land, at sea and in the air. The Space and Missile Systems Center at Los Angeles Air Force Base, Calif. manages the DMSP program.

Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company is a major operating unit of Lockheed Martin Corporation, designs, develops, tests, manufactures and operates a full spectrum of advanced-technology systems for national security, civil and commercial customers. Chief products include human space flight systems; a full range of remote sensing, navigation, meteorological and communications satellites and instruments; space observatories and interplanetary spacecraft; laser radar; fleet ballistic missiles; and missile defense systems.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 140,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2006 sales of $39.6 billion.

Media Contact: Buddy Nelson, (510) 797-0349; e-mail, buddynelson@mac.com,
For additional information about Lockheed Martin, visit our website:
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First Call Analyst:
FCMN Contact:

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