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# Vandenberg commander gears up for more launches: 'SpaceX is going to keep us hopping'

*Janene Scully*

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## SpaceX Launches Starlink Satellites on Falcon 9 Rocket

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### SpaceX launches a Falcon 9 rocket carrying 64 small satellites

A Falcon 9 rocket launched from Vandenberg Space Force Base successfully carried the next batch of Starlink satellites into orbit just before 9 p.m. The polar orbit will help serve satellite Internet customers in the north in Alaska and Scandinavia. By [David Middlecamp](#)

A missile test on a Sunday morning and a rocket launch on Monday night helped [Vandenberg Space Force Base](#) set a record

and move another step toward realizing the future.

Col. Robert “Rob” Long, commander of Space Launch Delta 30, recently spoke about the dramatic changes ahead for the 100,000-acre installation near Lompoc, which serves as the nation’s western spaceport.

Vandenberg hosted two launches in about 34 hours — the missile-defense test on Sept. 12 followed by the Falcon rocket launch Sept. 13.

Those liftoffs happened only because of “an amazing partnership” between Vandenberg’s primary unit and customers, Space Exploration Technologies and Missile Defense Agency, Long said.

“If we want to be a range of the future, and consequently a range of choice, we have to be able to offer that kind of flexibility because that’s what commercial companies are going to demand,” Long said.

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Defense Department customers also might demand that type of flexibility in the future, he added.

In the near term, SpaceX is expected to have several launches, including to add to its Starlink constellation over several months and at least one NASA mission in late November.

“SpaceX is going to keep us hopping, which is great,” Long said.

A growing commercial space industry will mean more launches.

“Obviously, the more satellites that the companies are building the more that we’re going to need to launch them, so it’s a nice part of the business to be in,” Long said.

One project in the works, in conjunction with regional organizations such as REACH, involves creating a commercial space zone on Vandenberg land but outside security gates in hopes of fostering development of the industry.

Tests of the ground-based strategic deterrent or new intercontinental ballistic missile to replace the Minuteman III fleet also are expected to pick up in the coming years.

“One of the top priorities that we have here at Vandenberg is supporting that program. It’s critical obviously to the nation in that strategic deterrence is going to modernize that ICBM fleet,” he said.

“It’s not going to slow down. ... All of the projections are upward for sure.”

It has been a whirlwind year of changes at Vandenberg, where the installation transferred from an U.S. Air Force base to U.S. Space Force, and the primary unit became Space Launch Delta 30 instead of 30th Space Wing.

Currently, roughly 130 positions at Vandenberg are designated to be Guardians, the name for those serving in Space Force.

The Air Force will continue to have a huge presence at Vandenberg, fulfilling vital roles such firefighting, security, medical and other duties.

“The Space Force cannot be successful without the Air Force being right there,” Long said.

Long grew up as the son of an Air Force officer and studied engineering while on an ROTC scholarship. Eye problems ruled out a career as a military pilot, landing Long in the space and missile career field.

This has marked his third stint at Vandenberg after attending initial training there in 1998 and then filling two assignments between 2014 and 2017 before retiring again in September 2020. He assumed command of Vandenberg's primary unit in June.

"It's a great time to be part of the launch business right now. It's fun. It's always fun, but when you're doing a lot of launches at the same time, it makes it even that much more rewarding," Long said at the end of the base's five launches in six weeks.