

Air Force Considers Delaying Initial Launch Of GPS 3 Satellite Until 2015

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After giving consideration earlier this year to accelerating the deployment of its next generation of navigation satellites, the U.S. Air Force now is leaning toward delaying the system to make more funding available in the near-term for its troubled missile warning satellite program, according to industry sources.

Current plans call for launching the Global Positioning System (GPS) 3 series of satellites beginning in 2011, and meeting that schedule would require a significant expenditure of funds beginning next year. The sources said the Air Force now is debating whether to delay the initial GPS 3 launch date to 2015 to help cover cost growth on the **Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS) High** missile warning system.

The plan, under discussion as the Air Force develops its budget proposal for 2004, likely would entail buying about 12 additional GPS Block 2F satellites from Boeing Co. to maintain a healthy constellation until GPS 3 comes on line, the sources said. Boeing Space and Communications Group of Seal Beach, Calif., already is under contract to build six GPS 2F spacecraft, which are slated to begin launching around 2005.

Air Force Gen. Lance W. Lord, commander of Air Force Space Command, which oversees space procurements, confirmed during a June 4 interview that delaying GPS 3 and buying more Boeing satellites is being considered. But he said the Air Force is keeping its options open on the program. During a June 5 discussion here, Lord declined to comment on whether he supports funding GPS 3 in 2004. The discussion was sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank here.

The Air Force will submit its final 2004 budget proposal to the Office of the Secretary of Defense in late August, according to Air Force Maj. Angela Billings, a spokeswoman for the service.

Joseph Davidson, a spokesman for Air Force Space and Missile Systems Center in Los Angeles, said the GPS Program office, which is located at that facility, would have no comment on the possibility of delaying GPS 3. Earlier this year, Air Force Col. Douglas Loverro, the director of the GPS Joint Program Office, raised the possibility of accelerating the initial GPS 3 launch date to 2009 to make its advanced capabilities available to U.S. and allied forces sooner. A key

feature of the GPS 3 satellites is their high power, which will dramatically reduce their susceptibility to jamming or accidental interference.

However, the industry sources said the acceleration option fell off the table after the Air Force directed Boeing and Lockheed Martin to boost - albeit to a lesser degree - the power of the GPS 2F and GPS 2R satellite systems, respectively. The GPS 2R series of satellites, built by Lockheed Martin Space Systems, Missiles and Space Operations of Sunnyvale, Calif., are currently being deployed. Fourteen of those satellites have yet to launch.

The upgrades authorized for the GPS 2F and GPS 2R satellites are expected to boost their power by about 10 times, industry sources said. The GPS 3 satellites are expected to have 500 times the power originally planned for the GPS 2F and GPS 2R satellites, the sources said.

Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Spectrum Astro of Gilbert, Ariz., are competing for the GPS 3 prime contract. That contract currently is slated for award in early 2003, but that date likely would change if GPS 3 is delayed. The Air Force has requested \$100 million for the GPS 3 program next year.

Mike Rizzo, director of navigation systems at Boeing Space and Communications, said his company is prepared to build additional GPS 2F satellites if the Air Force ultimately chooses to delay the GPS 3 procurement. Boeing could make significant improvements to the power, accuracy and signal integrity of the additional satellites by 2011, he said. Rick Skinner, vice president of Lockheed Martin Navigation Systems of King of Prussia, Pa., said delaying GPS 3 likely will increase its cost, now estimated at around \$2 billion. It also could cause the break-up of the industry teams competing for the contract, he said.

Civilian GPS users, meanwhile, have been looking forward to the accuracy improvements promised with GPS 3 and would be disappointed if the program is delayed, said Fred Corle, president of the Spatial Technologies Industry Association.