

# News – Private rocket falters after N.M. launch

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Private rocket falters after N.M. launch

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Associated Press

UPHAM, N.M. – The first rocket launched from New Mexico's spaceport failed to reach space Monday, wobbling and dropping back to Earth barely a tenth of the way into its journey.

The unmanned, 20-foot SpaceLoft XL rocket, among the first to be launched from any commercial U.S. spaceport, was carrying various experiments and other payloads for its planned suborbital trip 70 miles above Earth.

The rocket took off at 2:14 p.m. and was supposed to drop back to Earth about 13 minutes later at White Sands Missile Range, just north of the launch site. But three miles from the launch site, witnesses saw the rocket wobble, then go into a corkscrew motion before disappearing in the clear sky.

Something went wrong shortly after takeoff. Officials with UP Aerospace, the Connecticut-based company that funded the launch, said the rocket reached only about 40,000 feet – or 7 1/2 miles.

It was not immediately clear where the craft landed or what condition it was in. Launch logistical coordinator Tracey Larson said it was possible that the rocket and its payload could have survived the crash.

Despite the crash, the launch still was considered a success because the rocket got airborne, Larson said. "If it was easy, everyone would be doing it," she said.

The rocket launched from a temporary pad at a site in Upham, in southern New Mexico, which also is the planned home of a state-built \$225 million spaceport. Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group,

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announced plans last year to base his space tourism company, Virgin Galactic, in New Mexico and to launch manned flights from the spaceport by the end of the decade.

Eric Knight, UP Aerospace CEO, said last week that Monday's flight marked a chance for the public to have "direct access to space." Payload space on one of his rockets ranges from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands of dollars, depending on size, he said.

Several other UP Aerospace flights are set later this year, Larson said. An Oct. 21 flight is expected to carry the ashes of Mercury astronaut Gordon Cooper and actor James Doohan, who starred as chief engineer Montgomery "Scotty" Scott on the original "Star Trek" TV series.