

SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launches cargo to space station

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KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, Fla., June 3 (UPI) — [SpaceX](#) launched tiny squids, medical experiments and improved solar panels for the International Space Station from Florida on Thursday afternoon.

The 7,300-pound cargo mission rose into a mostly cloudy sky aboard a Falcon 9 rocket as planned at 1:29 p.m. EDT from Complex 39A at Kennedy Space Center.

Eight minutes after launch, SpaceX recovered the first-stage booster by landing it on [a drone](#) ship in the Atlantic Ocean.

“We’re actually flying a new booster this mission,” Sarah Walker, the company’s director of mission management for the Dragon capsule, said at a press conference Wednesday.

“This is the 17th mission that SpaceX has launched just in this front half of 2021 ... and the first one that’s on a new booster.”

SpaceX reuses first-stage boosters up to nine times, but the company is slowly introducing new boosters as the previously flown vehicles reach the limit.

SpaceX plans to dock the capsule at the space station early Saturday morning.

Two of the new 63-foot-long solar panels make up a large bulk of the cargo, curled up like a jelly roll inside SpaceX’s Dragon capsule, according to NASA.

The panels will not replace the solar arrays on the space station, but rather augment them. The older solar panels are degrading after 20 years, said Matt LaPointe, technical director at California-based Deployable Space Systems, the contractor that built the new technology.

The solar panels are faceted so they can roll up easily, and they will spring into place on compressed rods, LaPointe said Wednesday.

“It’s like a snap bracelet or a tape measure in reverse. They want to form out into this tube. So we don’t need motors or anything like that to deploy them,” he said.

The tiny squid on board are to be used in an experiment to determine how bacteria interact with cells in a living creature, according to the project researcher, University of Florida professor of microbiology Jamie Foster.

She's using larval bobtail squid because they utilize a type of bacteria in their anatomy to produce a glowing light in the wild. The squid will return to Earth in early July, after which Foster will study how the weightlessness of space affected the relationship between the bacteria and the animals.

In previous experiments, Foster found that weightlessness increased stress levels in the squid, but the bacteria helped to reduce stress.

Such research could help scientists understand how to keep astronauts healthy, she said.

"So having the beneficial microbes was helping the animal not have as much damage to the tissues and so far, so we want to validate that what we found on the ground using simulated micro data with the real thing and that's what we hope that this will show us I was like zero gravity flight or was a we'd have a way to simulate.

SpaceX's cargo mission, or CRS-22, is emblematic of the broad science and technology NASA can accomplish in low-Earth orbit, said Patrick O'Neill, communications manager for the space station's National Laboratory program, which is based at Kennedy Space Center.

"This mission is really a microcosm of what's possible," O'Neill said in an interview Wednesday. "So we have everything from Fortune 500 companies to academic organizations to students even sending payloads up. It ranges from life sciences to physical sciences to material sciences to cube satellites."

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