NASA declares that SpaceX is ready to fly its first crewed mission



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- Early on Thursday, SpaceX began the process of rolling its Falcon 9 rocket out to the launch pad.
- The vehicle will launch from Launch Complex 39A at Kennedy Space Center.
- Here’s a close-up view of Dragon with the shiny solar panels on its trunk.
- Operations continued throughout the morning.
- SpaceX constructed a special launch tower for crewed missions.
- About time to go vertical.
- The rocket will undergo a static-fire test on Friday

afternoon.
- The there will be a final Launch Readiness Review meeting on Monday.
- All of this should clear the vehicle for flight next Wednesday.
- Weather permitting.

On Thursday and Friday, senior managers from NASA, SpaceX, and the space agency's international partners held long meetings to review all of the aspects of an upcoming flight of the Falcon 9 rocket and Crew Dragon spacecraft.

These discussions must have gone well, because on Friday afternoon, NASA officials emerged with a clear message: "There are no significant issues," said NASA Associate Administrator Steve Jurczyk, who led the meetings behind closed doors at Kennedy Space Center. "In the end, it was a very clean review. We are ready to launch."

The flight of the Crew Dragon spacecraft, carrying Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken to the International Space Station, is set to begin at 4:33pm ET (20:33 UTC) on Wednesday, May 27. It will be the first orbital launch of humans from the United States since July 2011, when the space shuttle made its final flight. NASA paid SpaceX to develop this transportation system and will serve as its primary customer. This commercial arrangement has saved NASA billions of dollars.

Throughout a news conference on Friday, officials praised the hard work that SpaceX and NASA engineers have conducted to reach the point where the company is ready to fly. It's notable that only a little more than a year has passed since a Crew Dragon spacecraft was destroyed during a test-firing of its SuperDraco thrusters.

Since that time, SpaceX has addressed not only the root cause of that problem but has also overseen a complete redesign of the vehicle's parachute system. The company closed out dozens

of other significant issues to reach this point.

NASA’s manager of the Commercial Crew Program, Kathy Lueders, acknowledged that the process has been a whirlwind. “Last April, I probably wasn’t thinking I was going to be flying in a year, but you know what—you can never sell this NASA and SpaceX team short,” she said. “They’ve always accomplished miracles for me. And I’m very, very proud of them.”

Work remains to be done before next Wednesday’s flight. SpaceX will conduct a static-fire test of its Falcon 9 rocket on Friday afternoon, on Saturday the crew will conduct a “dry” dress rehearsal in which Hurley and Behnken suit up for launch day, and there will be a Launch Readiness Review meeting on Monday. But the biggest concern is probably weather; there are multiple constraints for the Falcon 9 launch and emergency abort scenarios down range. Florida may see some scattered to widespread showers next week, according to medium-range weather models.

Yet NASA and SpaceX are very close. Jurczyk said Friday it “is hard to believe” we are just five days from launching this crewed mission, and we have to agree. We can’t wait.

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