

SpaceX loses another Starship prototype in massive explosion

A fourth prototype of SpaceX's next generation Starship rocket exploded right after a test at the company's south Texas test site on Friday. Shortly after SpaceX ignited the engine on the test rocket, a massive fireball engulfed the vehicle in flames, leaving very little hardware still standing and apparently causing damage to the test site.

The failed test comes just a day before SpaceX is set to perform an unrelated launch for NASA that will send two astronauts to the International Space Station. That historic mission will take place out of Cape Canaveral, Florida, on SpaceX's workhorse Falcon 9 rocket, which has flown more than 100 times before.

While the failure of the Starship prototype is not linked to the upcoming NASA mission, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk did tell *Aviation Week* that SpaceX planned to put a pause on Starship development while the company focused on its first crewed flight. "I have redirected SpaceX's priorities to be very focused on the crew launch," Musk told *Aviation Week* during a podcast interview published on May 26th. "So that's going to slow things down on the Starship front."

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The prototype that just exploded is meant to test out the design for SpaceX's future Starship, a giant rocket the company wants to create to send people to deep space destinations like the Moon and Mars. SpaceX has been building

various test versions of the Starship down at the company's work site in Boca Chica, Texas. Today, the company ignited the main Raptor engine on the latest Starship prototype while holding the vehicle down, a type of test known as a static fire. It was the fifth static fire test SpaceX had conducted over the last couple of weeks.

The explosion marks yet another failure that's destroyed a Starship prototype. SpaceX already lost three previous test versions of the vehicle during pressurized tests that either caused the vehicles to burst or implode. This particular Starship got further along in the testing process than the others. With this latest failure, it seems unlikely that anything is salvageable, and there seems to be some damage to the area surrounding the test site, too. It's unclear if anyone was hurt in the explosion. SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment before publication.

Had the Starship prototype remained intact, SpaceX had plans to fly the vehicle on a low-altitude flight test in the coming days. On May 28th, the Federal Aviation Administration granted SpaceX a license to conduct "suborbital reusable launch vehicle missions" with the vehicle out of Boca Chica. The FAA also placed air restrictions over the launch site for June 1st, preventing vehicles from flying below 26,000 feet over the area. Now, those restrictions will likely be lifted as SpaceX works on its next prototype.

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/29/21274931/spacex-starship-prototype-rocket-explosion-static-fire-test>