SpaceX planning to launch up to 52 missions in 2022

Commercial space company SpaceX plans to launch a whopping 52 flights in 2022, a NASA safety panel revealed today during a meeting. If successful, it would be the most launches the company has ever conducted in a single year, with its previous record last year at 31 launches.

The impressive figure was given during a virtual meeting of NASA's Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel, or ASAP, which gives guidance to the space agency on how to maintain safety within its biggest programs. "NASA and SpaceX will have to be watchful during 2022 that they're not victims of their success," Sandy Magnus, a former NASA astronaut and member of the panel, said during the meeting. "There's an ambitious 52-launch manifest for SpaceX over the course of the year. And that's an incredible pace."

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SpaceX is a major partner for NASA on human spaceflight. The company is responsible for ferrying NASA's astronauts and cargo to and from the International Space Station with its Crew Dragon spacecraft, and SpaceX is currently developing a next-generation rocket system, called Starship, to land people on the surface of the Moon for NASA's Artemis program.

However, SpaceX has plenty of customers outside of NASA, as well. It periodically launches satellites for other companies, international customers, and the Department of Defense. But a good chunk of SpaceX's launches for the year will be for SpaceX itself. The company is currently in the midst of building out a massive satellite constellation called Starlink, which entails launching thousands of spacecraft into

low- to medium-Earth orbit to provide broadband Internet access to the entire globe. Every couple of weeks, SpaceX has been launching these satellites in batches of roughly 50 to 60 vehicles.

Spaceflight schedules are always subject to change, so there's no guarantee that SpaceX will meet the 52-launch figure. SpaceX CEO Elon Musk said the company was striving to hit 48 launches in 2021 but only made it to 31. So far this year, SpaceX has already launched three missions, and it has another one scheduled for this afternoon. SpaceX did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

While meeting the number would certainly be admirable, NASA's ASAP panel also warned about the downsides of having such a packed manifest. "Both NASA and SpaceX will have to ensure the appropriate attention and priority are focused on NASA missions," Magnus said, "and that the right resources are brought to bear to maintain that pace at a safe measure."

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