

# Rocket Blast A Setback To Space Tourism

BY BRIAN MELLEY AND JUSTIN PRITCHARD

Associated Press

MOJAVE, Calif. — Commercial space tourism suffered a huge setback Friday when a prototype passenger rocket exploded during a test flight, scattering debris over the Mojave Desert and killing one pilot while seriously injuring the other.

Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo blew apart Friday after being released from a carrier aircraft at high altitude, according to Ken Brown, a photographer who witnessed the explosion.

One pilot was killed and one seriously injured in the accident about 120 miles north of downtown Los Angeles. The area is in desert north of Mojave Air and Space Port, where the test flight originated.

British billionaire Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Galactic, has been the front-runner in the fledgling race to send large numbers of paying civilians beyond the atmosphere to give them the feeling of weightlessness and a spectacular view of Earth below. Branson tweeted that he was flying to Mojave immediately.

"I think it's a real setback to the idea that lots of people are going to be taking joyrides into the fringes of outer space any time soon," said John Logsdon, retired space policy director at George Washington University. "There were a lot of people who believed that the technology to carry people safely at hand."

After a period of development that lasted far longer than hundreds of prospective passengers had expected, the accident occurred just as it seemed space flights were near.

When Virgin Group licensed the technology from Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, who funded about \$26 million for SpaceShipOne, Branson envisioned operating



AL SEIB/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT  
**Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo (SS2), the world's first commercial spaceline, glides over Mojave airport during its third rocket-powered supersonic flight Jan. 10, 2014. On Friday, the aircraft crashed during a test flight.**

flights by 2007. In interviews last month, he talked about the first flight being next spring with his son.

SpaceShipTwo, which is typically flown by two pilots, was designed to provide a suborbital thrill ride into space before it returns to Earth as a glider.

Officials said they don't know what caused Friday's accident and had not noticed anything wrong beforehand.

"I detected nothing that appeared abnormal," said Stuart Witt, CEO of the Mojave Air and Space Port.

Friday's flight marked the 55th for the spaceship, which was intended to be the first of a line of craft. At 60 feet long, SpaceShipTwo features two large windows for each of up to six passengers, one on the side and one overhead.

Virgin Galactic — owned by Branson's Virgin Group and Aabar Investments PJS of Abu Dhabi — sells seats on each prospective journey for \$250,000, with full payment due at the time of booking. The company says that "future astronauts," as it calls customers, have visited Branson's Caribbean home, Necker

Island, and gone through G-force training.

Stephen Hawking, Justin Bieber, Ashton Kutcher and Russell Brand are among the celebrities to sign up for flights. Virgin Galactic reports taking deposits totaling more than \$80 million from about 700 people.

A related venture, The Spaceship Co., is responsible for building Virgin Galactic's space vehicles.

During testing for the development of a rocket motor for SpaceShipTwo in July 2007, an explosion at the Mojave spaceport killed three workers and critically injured three others. A California Division of Occupational Safety and Health report said the blast occurred three seconds after the start of a cold-flow test of nitrous oxide — commonly known as laughing gas — which is used in the propulsion system of SpaceShipTwo. The engine was not firing during that test.

Friday's accident was the second space-related explosion this week.

On Tuesday, an unmanned commercial supply rocket bound for the International

Space Station exploded moments after liftoff from a launch site in Virginia. No injuries were reported that accident, which drew criticism over NASA's growing reliance on private U.S. companies in this post-shuttle era.

Virgin Galactic had planned to launch space tourism flights from the quarter-billion-dollar Spaceport America in southern New Mexico once it finished developing its rocket ship.

Christine Anderson, executive director of the New Mexico Spaceport Authority, did not want to comment on the events unfolding Friday in the California desert or what effect they might have on Spaceport America and the future of commercial space travel.

Virgin Galactic is in line to be the main tenant at the spaceport that was built specifically to launch paying customers into space, a dream of Branson's. His company has repeated pushed back the timetable for when the \$250,000 flights were to begin, pointing to delays in development and testing of the rocket ship.

Taxpayers footed the bill to build the state-of-the-art hangar and runway in a remote stretch of desert in southern New Mexico as part of a plan devised by Branson and former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson. Critics have long challenged the state's investment, questioning whether flights would ever get off the ground.

SpaceShipTwo is based on aerospace design maverick Burt Rutan's award-winning SpaceShipOne prototype, which became the first privately financed manned rocket to reach space in 2004.

"It's an enormously sad day for a company," Burt Rutan told The Associated Press in a call from his home in Idaho, where he lives since retiring.

## Liberia Opens Large Ebola Center

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) — Remembering those who have died in the world's deadliest Ebola outbreak, Liberia's president opened one of the country's largest Ebola treatment centers in Monrovia on Friday amid hopes that the disease is finally on the decline in this West African country.

American and U.N. officials as well as Cuban doctors were in the crowd as President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf opened the treatment center, which is set up to hold 200 patients and can eventually treat as many as 300. With the opening of the center, an Ebola treatment unit at JFK Medical Center has been closed. Many people with other diseases had been nervous about going to the nation's largest referral hospital, and officials hope they will now come back.

The opening of the center, built out of white plastic sheeting with USAID written across it, comes as fewer people are showing up for treatment at various centers. Officials are not sure how to interpret that. Some believe it's a sign that the Ebola outbreak is finally on the wane in Liberia.

"It is heartening to see that we are finally perhaps catching up with that boulder if not in front of it. It was rolling down the hill at a speed that we were never going to catch, we thought, two months ago, but we're starting to make progress," said U.S. Ambassador Deborah Malac.

Others believe Sirleaf's order that the bodies of Ebola victims in the capital be cremated has led to people with symptoms hiding at home, because cremation violates traditions.

## Questions In Survey Trigger Complaints

WASHINGTON (AP) — Shocked and offended by explicit questions, some U.S. servicemen and women are complaining about a new sexual-assault survey that hundreds of thousands have been asked to complete.

The survey is conducted every two years. But this year's version, developed by the Rand Corp., is unusually detailed, including graphically personal questions on sexual acts.

Some military members told The Associated Press that they were surprised and upset by the questions, and some even said they felt re-victimized by the blunt language. None of them would speak publicly by name, but Pentagon officials confirmed they had received complaints that the questions were "intrusive" and "invasive."

The Defense Department said it made the survey much more explicit and detailed this year in order to get more accurate results as the military struggles to reduce its sexual assaults while also encouraging victims to come forward to get help.

The survey questions, which were obtained by The Associated Press, ask about any unwanted sexual experiences or contact, and include very specific wording about men's and women's body parts or other objects, and kinds of contact or penetration.

## People Flock To See Hawaii Lava

PAHOA, Hawaii (AP) — Two Hawaii residents have been arrested for trespassing to see lava amid growing interest from people eager to witness the slow-moving flow.

Hawaii County police saw a man and a woman on county property Thursday taking photos within 5 feet of the lava.

Police say they had two golf clubs that had been dipped in lava, which had hardened on the clubs.

The 65-year-old woman and 59-year-old man, who police say are from the area, were arrested.

Hawaii County Civil Defense Director Darryl Oliveira says the county is restricting the public's access to the lava flow to keep people safe.

# Judge Rejects Attempt To Isolate Nurse

BY ROBERT F. BUKATY

Associated Press

FORT KENT, Maine — A Maine judge gave nurse Kaci Hickox the OK to go wherever she pleases, handing state officials a defeat Friday in the nation's biggest court case yet over how to balance personal liberty, public safety and fear of Ebola.

Judge Charles C. LaVerdiere ruled that Hickox must continue daily monitoring of her health but said there is no need to isolate her or restrict her movements because she has no symptoms and is therefore not contagious.

The judge also decried the "misconceptions, misinformation, bad science and bad information" circulating about the lethal disease in the U.S.

After the ruling, a state police cruiser that had been posted outside Hickox's home left, and she and her boyfriend stepped outside to thank the judge.

Hickox, 33, called it "a good day" and said her "thoughts, prayers and gratitude" remain with those who are still battling Ebola in West Africa.

She said she had no immediate plans other than to watch a scary movie at home on Halloween in this town of 4,300 people on the remote northern edge of Maine, near the Canadian border.

Maine health officials had gone to

court on Thursday in an attempt to bar her from crowded public places and require her to stay at least 3 feet from others until the 21-day incubation period for Ebola was up on Nov. 10. She would have been free to jog or go bike riding.

But the judge turned the state down.

Gov. Paul LePage said he disagreed with the ruling but will abide by it. Officials said there are no plans to appeal.

"As governor, I have done everything I can to protect the health and safety of Mainers. The judge has eased restrictions with this ruling, and I believe it is unfortunate," LePage said.

Later in the day, the governor lashed out at Hickox, saying: "She has violated every promise she has made so far, so I can't trust her. I don't trust her. And I don't trust that we know enough about this disease to be so callous."

Hickox was thrust into the center of a national debate after she returned to the U.S. last week from treating Ebola victims in West Africa as a volunteer for Doctors Without Borders.

She contended that the state's confining her to her home in what it called a voluntary quarantine violated her rights and was unsupported by science. She defied the restrictions twice, once to go on a bike ride and once to talk to the media and shake a reporter's hand.

In his ruling, the judge thanked Hickox

for her service in Africa and acknowledged the gravity of restricting someone's constitutional rights without solid science to back it up.

"The court is fully aware of the misconceptions, misinformation, bad science and bad information being spread from shore to shore in our country with respect to Ebola," he wrote. "The court is fully aware that people are acting out of fear and that this fear is not entirely rational."

Hickox's quarantine in Maine — and, before that, in New Jersey, upon her arrival back in the U.S. — led humanitarian groups, the White House and many scientists to warn that automatically quarantining medical workers could discourage volunteers from going to West Africa, where more than 13,500 people have been sickened and nearly 5,000 have died from Ebola.

Hickox has been vilified by some and hailed by others. She has been getting a similarly mixed reaction from her health care colleagues.

On a popular nursing website, all-nurses.com, some nurses felt the 21-day quarantine was a sensible precaution for those returning from a high-risk area, while others were more critical, accusing her of giving nurses everywhere a bad name.

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