

Navy questions how launches would affect Kings Bay

By GORDON JACKSON gjackson@thebrunswicknews.com
Feb 11, 2021

Limited trajectories and autonomous termination systems make it unlikely a launch malfunction would reach Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay from a proposed spaceport in Camden County about five miles away from the base.

That's the answer given to the Department of Defense when a consultant representing Camden County responded to specific questions about potential impacts to King Bay from a rocket malfunction.

"While specific analysis was not completed to analyze ordnance facilities at NSB Kings Bay, flight safety analysis models conducted by Aerospace Corporation demonstrated that with the use of limit lines and Autonomous Flight Safety Systems it is possible to reduce the chance of debris in the vicinity of NSB Kings Bay to near zero," consultants with Kimbley Horn said.



DoD officials wanted to know if an analysis had been done for buildings at Kings Bay that may house large ordnance. The base maintains and stores nuclear ballistic missiles that are carried aboard Ohio-class submarines deployed from Kings Bay.

The probability of a rocket malfunction turning toward Kings Bay, combined with a failure of the autonomous termination system, has not been considered, consultants said. But a safety analysis of the launch system and termination system would be required for the launch operator to receive a license to operate from the spaceport.

"This probability question would be best addressed at that time for the specific launch system analyzed," consultants said.

The fail-safe devices did little to reassure Kevin Lang, an Athens lawyer and property owner on Little Cumberland Island. He said the memorandum addresses the Navy's concerns, which are different from the ones he and other Little Cumberland Island residents have.

"We share the Navy's concerns with rockets that may veer off their intended trajectories," he said. "Those situations may result in the rocket being destroyed by a flight termination system with the debris raining down on whatever happens to be below it. Our biggest concern is the likelihood that some of that debris will be on fire or hot enough to ignite a fire on impact."

A fire on a barrier island with no fire department and homes in hard-to-reach locations has potential to be catastrophic, he said.

Join YOUR CHAMBER!

Anchoring the Business Community.

Follow Us on Social:

 @bgicoc

 @bgichamber

Brunswick-Golden Isles Chamber of Commerce

www.brunswickgoldenisleschamber.com

(912) 265-0620



“A multi-point fire on Little Cumberland Island could result in the loss of every home on the island in a matter of hours,” Lang said. “Obviously there is also substantial risk that one or more members of our community could be injured or killed in that scenario.”

The Federal Aviation Administration is scheduled to make a final decision on the Environmental Impact Statement next month that will determine if Camden County officials get a license to establish a spaceport. Individual launches would need additional FAA approval.

The license request is to launch small sub-orbital and orbital rockets from the site.

Lang said most small rocket companies won’t be able to afford the insurance for mitigation. He said a small rocket company in Alaska had several launch failures over land that the state ended up paying to mitigate.

It would be even more costly and complicated for an environmental cleanup of saltwater marshes.

“You can very easily cause even more damage to these fragile ecosystems by introducing equipment and other disruptive means of removing rocket debris and chemicals,” Lang said.

It’s likely the launch site operator — Camden County — would be responsible for the cost to mitigate a rocket explosion or crash.

“Camden County does not have the funds to handle a costly mitigation, so the ultimate cost would likely fall on taxpayers of the state of Georgia with DNR handling the mitigation of their jurisdictional areas (salt marshes, tidal creeks, and rivers),” Lang said. “National Park Service could also be compelled to pay for mitigation for failures that impact Cumberland Island.”



Gordon Jackson