

# Southern Cal Still Soars With Aerospace Industry

**ECONOMY:** Region serves up advantages that power sector, according to study.

The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp. released a study earlier this month on the aerospace industry in Southern California that says the region remains the best place for such work due to legacy companies, workforce and innovation.

Space vehicles and guided missile technology were the areas showing the most growth in terms of development and employment, according to the study.

Christine Cooper, a senior vice president who heads up the economic teams at LAEDC, said part of the study involved surveying employers throughout Los Angeles County.

“What they said is there is a culture of risk-taking and entrepreneurship that cultivates a spirit to take part in an industry like this,” she said.

Southern California accounts for nearly 250,000 aerospace-related jobs, including the related supply chain. The study says the average salary in aerospace comes in at \$105,000.



AVIATION & AEROSPACE

Mark R. Madler

Jobs developing and building space vehicles and guided missiles have grown by about 64 percent since 2004.

The county has become a hotbed for space and missile research as it is home to rocket builder Space Exploration Technologies Corp., or SpaceX, in Hawthorne, and Virgin Galactic and Xcor

Aerospace, both of which are building reusable vehicles to take passengers to suborbital altitudes. A guided missile system for the Navy is being developed by Orbital ATK Inc. at its Northridge facility.

As defense spending has waned in recent years, the work done by component suppliers in the San Fernando, Santa Clarita and Antelope valleys has shifted to the commercial side of the industry. But often what is developed for nonmilitary uses finds its way into fighter jets and other applications.

“The (Pentagon) is not afraid of adopting the technology coming out of the commercial sector,” Cooper said.

Aerospace is likely to remain a bright spot in the Southern California economy due to high-profile programs coming its way.

Northrop Grumman Corp. received a Pentagon contract last year valued at \$60 billion to develop and build the next-generation bomber for the Air Force. Assembly work on the plane is expected to be done at Northrop’s plant in Palmdale. More than 1,000 jobs could be created by the bomber program.

In Chatsworth, Aerojet Rocketdyne Holdings Inc. will make the RS-25 engine for use on Space Launch System, NASA’s heavy rocket that would take astronauts to the moon and possibly to Mars. The contract is valued at more than \$1.2 billion through 2024.

## Aerospace Days

A delegation from the Antelope Valley Board of Trade made a visit to state lawmakers in Sacramento this month that coincided with the fifth annual California Aerospace Days.

Sponsored by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Aerospace Days brought together business representatives, aerospace enthusiasts and elected officials Feb. 29 and March 1 to discuss the importance of the industry for the state.

Terry Norris, secretary of the trade board,



Cooper

Precision Labs in Palmdale, Norris said he watched the printed circuit-board business disappear when that work left for Asia. He doesn’t want to see something similar happen to his aerospace clients.

“You know that other states are pulling them away if we do not fight,” he said.

Antelope Valley representatives met with

said that it is important that lawmakers do what they can to prevent California aerospace companies and jobs from moving to states such as Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

At his company, manufacturing equipment calibration firm

Sen. Sharon Runner (R-Lancaster), staff of Sen. Jean Fuller (R-Bakersfield) and Assemblyman Tom Lackey (R-Palmdale), among others.

“He was scheduled for 30 minutes and spent more than an hour,” Norris said of Lackey, whose district takes in a majority of the Antelope Valley. “He was so engaging and had a lot to talk about.”

## Test Flights

Northrop has conducted flight tests at its Palmdale facility of the unmanned Global Hawk aircraft carrying a SYERS-2 intelligence gathering sensor.

The SYERS-2 is used on the U-2 spy plane and is capable of capturing images in adverse conditions such as haze and smoke. The Pentagon has plans to stop using the U-2 by 2019 and replace it with the Global Hawk for intel-

ligence gathering.

Northrop manufactures the unmanned plane in Palmdale. It uses a universal adapter bracket that allows the aircraft to support a variety of payloads.

Mick Jagers, vice president and program manager for the Global Hawk, said the payload adapter makes the drone capable of flying any mission required by the Air Force.

“Northrop Grumman is funding this study in order to prove that the system can affordably carry the same sensors as any other intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft,” Jagers said in a prepared statement.

Northrop will continue the test flights later this year with other payloads.

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