# SpaceX Plans to Triple Rocket Launches from Vandenberg by 2026, Prompting Environmental Concerns



**SpaceX Expands Launches from Vandenberg, Raising Environmental Concerns**

On March 18, SpaceX launched the Starlink 7-16 mission from Vandenberg Space Force Base, as observed from Los Angeles' Chinatown. SpaceX, a company owned by billionaire Elon Musk, announced plans to triple its rocket launches from Vandenberg by 2026. This increase is part of their broader push to redefine space exploration, and aims to increase the number of annual launches from 37 in 2023 to over 120 by 2026.

During a California Coastal Commission hearing, U.S. Space Force officials outlined these plans, emphasizing the military benefits. Notably, SpaceX surpassed its previous agreement with the commission, which limited launches to six per year, by launching 28 rockets last year. SpaceX is now seeking approval for 36 launches annually, escalating to 90 by 2026.

The increased launch frequency has raised concerns among local residents and environmental groups about potential impacts on marine life. Federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, closely monitor the effects. So far, observations indicate that animals such as sea otters and birds only temporarily react to the launches but return to their routines shortly after.

Environmental groups, including the Gaviota Coast Conservancy and the Surfrider Foundation, express worries about permanent ecological changes due to more frequent launches. Some experts suggest long-term exposure to high-decibel sounds could significantly affect wildlife behavior and health, potentially altering the ecosystem.

Members of the California Coastal Commission are also questioning whether SpaceX should be exempt from permit requirements, particularly given that only 25% of its launches serve U.S. government interests. There are also broader concerns about the concentration of technological power in a single private entity, especially given SpaceX's recent actions in international conflicts.

The Commission has indicated that further discussions with SpaceX representatives are necessary to reach a federal consistency ruling.

**Sources: Los Angeles Times**