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[Home](#) > DoD STARBASE Indiana Summer Campers Send Experiments Into Sky

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Eyes and hopes focused skyward Wednesday morning as DoD Starbase Indiana summer youth program participants sent a high-altitude balloon into flight with a variety of experiments in tow.

The launch took place from the south lawn of the IPFW Alumni Center, 1528 E. California Road.

About 30 young people in grades 7 to 9 are taking part in the local DoD Starbase Indiana SHARP advanced summer camp, which is free and emphasizes hands-on STEM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).

Youngsters designed small experiments that accompanied the balloon as it rose to about 100,000 feet above the Earth, said Susan Callaway, the local Starbase 2.0 program coordinator and a teacher at the camp. The balloon can carry only 12 pounds, including a computer and cameras recording what happens to the experiments as the balloon reaches thinner air in the second layer of the Earth's atmosphere.

Youngsters' experiments included testing the altitude's impact on animals in pond water, comparing strawberry DNA before and after the flight, and checking whether higher radiation levels in the atmosphere will recharge a dead battery, Callaway said.

After the launch about 10 a.m., youngsters monitored the balloon's ascent and travel on laptops inside the Alumni Center.

The difference between the thin air at high altitude and the air pressure inside the balloon will cause it to pop at about 100,000 feet, Callaway said. A parachute then carries the experiments and equipment back to Earth. Camp staff and participants predicted the landing would be south of Lima in northwest Ohio, Callaway said. A chase team in a vehicle will be waiting to pick up the equipment and experiments so they can be brought back and analyzed.

Their prediction was close: The program's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/starbaseIN> [1], and a link to a balloon tracking program indicated the chase team picked up the balloon about 2 1/2 hours after launch about 5 miles west of Lima.

Full credit for article goes to Kevin Kilbane and News-Sentinel.com (www.news-sentinel.com [2])

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