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Safety checks delay shuttle launch

Shuttle managers decided Jan. 15 to roll *Atlantis* back from the launch pad to allow additional inspection and testing of solid rocket booster cables. Pending the outcome of the inspections, *Atlantis* is planned for launch no earlier than Feb. 6.

"I guard against the phenomena of 'go fever' like it was the plague," NASA Space Shuttle Program Manager Ron Dittmore said. "When a challenge comes up, you have to be sensitive, to 'divorce' yourself from all the events and look carefully at the events and data of the particular challenge... I assure you that this program is extremely sensitive to the fact that we need clear evidence to overcome an anomaly that we don't totally understand."

The cable inspections on the entire shuttle fleet began as a result of an investigation of a primary explosive bolt that failed to fire during the launch of STS-97 on Nov. 30, 2000. The problem was traced to a flaw in the cable that was supposed to transmit the command for the bolt to fire. As a result, inspections of

other such cables on the shuttle fleet revealed some similar potential failures, and repairs were made to those cables. Inspections and tests were then ordered for all watertight cables used for functions other than commanding explosive bolts in the shuttle inventory that are

flown repeatedly on the solid rockets. Of the hundreds of spare cables tested, four conductors showed possible failures, which engineers are continuing to analyze. The inspection and tests of spare cables were not

"It doesn't matter if they launch this week, this month or this year, we [humankind] are in space to stay."

—William Shepherd
ISS Commander

completed until after *Atlantis* had been moved to the launch pad, and the results led to the Jan. 15 decision for further checks.

The cables to be checked on *Atlantis*' solid rockets are in a position where they cannot be reached at the launch pad. In the Vehicle Assembly Building, platforms are available to allow inspection, continuity checks and X-ray analysis on



A KSC worker inspects the reusable cable and connectors located inside the external tank attachment ring on *Atlantis*' left-hand solid rocket booster in December.

the 18 solid rocket booster cables located inside each booster's system tunnel, a housing that extends along most of the length of the rocket.

If all goes well, *Atlantis* should return to the launch pad Friday, Jan. 26, for the 102nd shuttle flight. Launch of STS-98 (ISS Assembly Flight 5A) is now scheduled for no earlier than Feb. 6, with liftoff

tentatively set for 5:37 p.m. CST.

Once the shuttle arrives at the station, three EVAs are scheduled to install the \$1.4-billion U.S. Destiny Lab. The first EVA is the first of the new millennium and the first of Mission Specialist Bob Curbeam's career. On this EVA, Mission

Please see **SHUTTLE DELAY**, Page 6

JSC names 10 new flight directors

The Mission Operations Directorate at Johnson Space Center has named 10 new flight directors. It is the largest class ever selected, and brings the number of current U.S. flight directors to 28.

"Such a large class was needed to support around-the-clock operation of the International Space Station," said Jeffrey W. Bantle, chief of the Flight Director Office. "The first flight director, Chris Kraft, was selected during the Mercury era. Since that time, only 48 men and women have served as flight directors throughout the history of human space flight."

The selection process began in June. "There were many outstanding people to choose from, which made the selection process most difficult," Bantle

said. "But it did remind me of the great talent, among both civil servants and contractors, in the Missions Operations Directorate, the Johnson Space Center and NASA."

A flight director manages the flight controllers who work in the Mission Control Center, and has overall responsibility for the successful management and execution of space flights. A flight

director also leads and orchestrates planning and integration activities with flight controllers, payload customers, International Space Station partners and others.

All of the 10 new flight directors have previously served as flight controllers. One works for a Canadian Space Agency contractor and another, the first flight director from the ranks of space station flight controllers, is employed by a NASA contractor.

The flight director class of 1983 with eight members had been the largest before selection of the class of 2000. ■

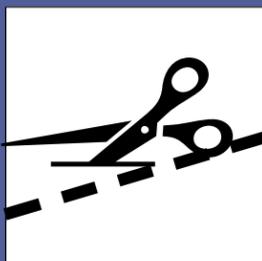


JSC's new flight directors class, front, left to right: Cathy Koerner, Joel Montalbano, Tony Ceccacci, Annette Hasbrook; back, Bryan Lunney, Steve Stich, John McCullough, Matt Abbott, Norm Knight, Derek Hassmann.



JSC readies for rodeo, trail riders.

Page 3



Clip-n-Save science activities.

Pages 5



JSC staff recognized with Snoopy Awards.

Page 7