

National

Fuel spill delays shuttle launch

United Press International
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A spill of less than three gallons of corrosive rocket propellant wiped out the Oct. 9 launch date for the space shuttle Columbia and may even force its removal from the launch pad.

Shuttle launch director George Page told a news conference late Tuesday the second launch of the reusable spacecraft probably will be put off at least two weeks.

Highly toxic nitrogen tetroxide propellant, leaking from a malfunctioning connector valve, rolled 20 feet down the side of the orbiter early Tuesday, destroying

the bonding of as many as 250 of its heat-resistant tiles — and possibly even reaching the Columbia's control system.

The only personnel on the launch pad at the time were specially clothed crewmen pumping propellant into the onboard fuel tanks, and none was hurt.

It was the second launch-pad accident involving the Columbia this year. In March, two technicians died when they entered a shuttle compartment filled with nitrogen gas and no oxygen.

"Within a short time (after Tuesday's spill), we began to see we had a pretty serious problem,"

Page said. He said 67 tiles "actually came loose in the hands of the technicians who were cleaning up the spill."

The spill, estimated at between 2 and 3 gallons, occurred at a servicing access panel on the outside of the Columbia and technicians feared the caustic propellant may have penetrated the panel's seals and contaminated hardware in the reaction control system, which enables the Columbia to maneuver in space.

If that has occurred, it would require time-consuming replacement and testing of hardware to insure the orbiter maneuvering

system would not malfunction in space.

Page said such repairs would mean the shuttle would have to be moved from the launch pad back to the vehicle assembly building, have its external fuel tank and two rocket boosters removed, then returned to the hangar. No manned spacecraft has ever been removed from the launch pad for repairs.

Page said a team of experts will spend the next two or three days examining the spill area to determine the extent of the damage and to get a good idea as to the length of the delay.

"We are not going to be able to

launch by the 9th of October," Page said. "In my book, it's down a week, and more likely weeks at the very best. We have a lot of work to do to get where we were."

Page said the mishap occurred when a "quick disconnect" malfunctioned during the operation.

The nitrogen tetroxide, like a solvent when it came in contact with the silica tiles bonding the shuttle's skin with special glue, "It destroys all the propellant the bonding agent — it breaks it and it has no adhesive quality," Page said.

Soviet planes detected off U.S. coast

United Press International
OTIS AIR FORCE BASE, Mass. — Two Soviet TU95D Bear reconnaissance aircraft were intercepted by U.S. air defense jet fighters off the East Coast of the United States Tuesday, officials said Wednesday.

Officials said the Soviet craft were escorted out of U.S. airspace and eventually returned to Cuba. The Soviet aircraft were de-

tected by North American Aerospace Defense Command radar as they penetrated the Air Defense Identification Zone about 250 miles southeast of Nantucket, Mass.

Two F-106 fighter-interceptors were scrambled from the Otis Air National Guard base and intercepted the Soviet flight at 7:40 a.m. EDT, 220 miles southeast of

Nantucket, Major Dick Pennie said.

Two other F-106's from Langley AFB, Virginia, and two from Charleston AFB, S.C., picked up the intercepted Soviet aircraft and escorted them as they continued their southward flight along the eastern seaboard.

The Soviets remained over international waters and did not

again penetrate U.S. airspace. Their closest approach to the U.S. mainland was approximately 130 miles off Cherry Point, N.C., Pennie said.

The Soviet flight originated from Cuba, where they flew northward outside radar detection over the Atlantic ocean, officials said.

It was the third such incident

this year. In January and February, Soviet reconnaissance planes were intercepted by air defense fighters on a similar course.

The Soviet aircraft, which flew a range of about 8,000 miles under constant surveillance from 9:45 a.m. when they were detected by ADIZ, east of Savannah, Pennie said.

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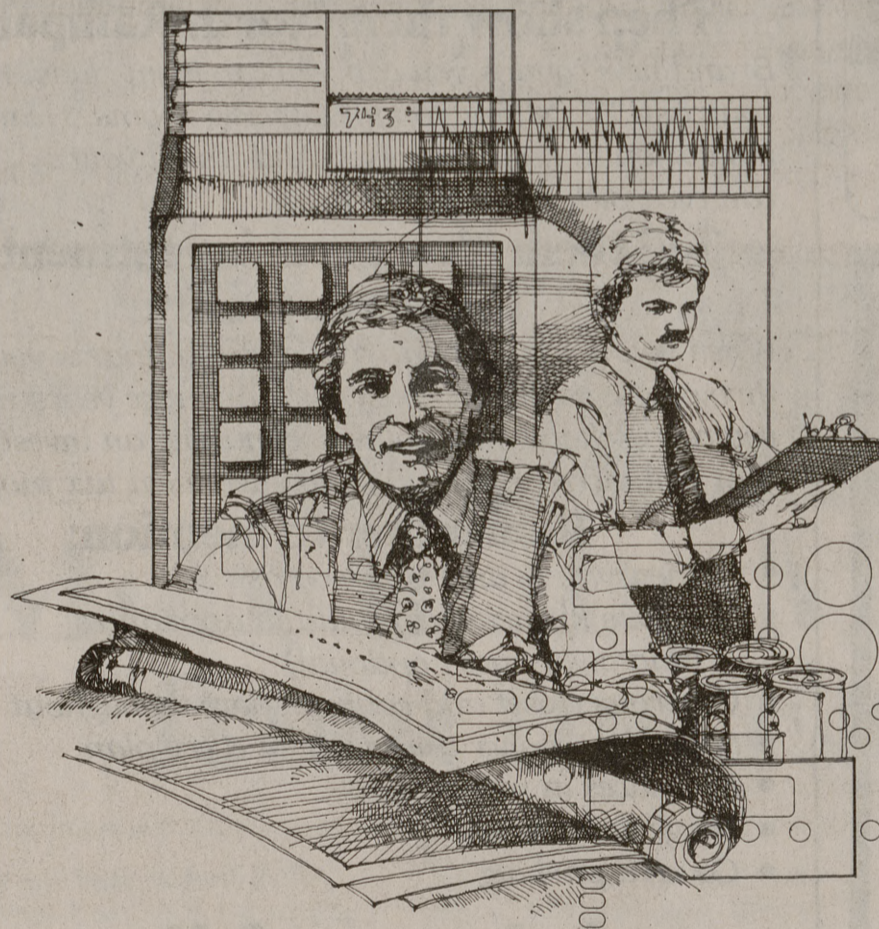
Couple claims 235 kids for \$350,000 in welfare

United Press International
LOS ANGELES — Johnnie and Francis Morris collected nearly \$350,000 by claiming 235 different children in one of the county's largest welfare fraud cases. Sometimes they borrowed other people's children to apply for aid. The couple was sentenced Tuesday to three years in prison.

Morris, 35, and his 39-year-old wife pleaded guilty in March 1980 to four counts of welfare fraud and three counts of forgery. Mrs. Morris also admitted to a charge of perjury. Sentencing was delayed 17 months to give the couple time to reimburse the county, but they failed to raise the needed amount.

Investigators said the Morris couple presented forged birth certificates and sometimes borrowed people's children for welfare benefits. They also used the names of other people's children to get welfare benefits. The couple was sentenced Tuesday to three years in prison.

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