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# NASA predicts no flight delay with Discovery

**United Press International**  
 CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A faulty computer assembly aboard the shuttle Discovery has been replaced and the problem should not delay next week's launch on a secret military mission, officials said Monday.

Repairs of the grounded shuttle Challenger's heat-shield tile system, however, are taking longer than expected and could force a delay of up to several days for its launch next month.

One of Discovery's two master event controllers, which control critical functions during ascent, failed a test Sunday and was replaced with a unit borrowed from Challenger.

Discovery is scheduled to blast off sometime between 1:15 p.m. and 4:15 p.m. on Jan. 23 and carry into orbit what defense sources say is a spy satellite.

The exact launch time is secret. The computer problem forced engineers to reschedule some work, but NASA spokesman Charles Redmond said it would not affect Discovery's launch or Challenger's planned blast off on Feb. 20.

"There will be no delay based on that," he said.

"We're still looking at how the tiles are going back on (Challenger)." Challenger was scheduled to take off for a secret military mission Dec. 8, but the shuttle was grounded when workers discovered that a bonding layer beneath thousands of tiles had weakened.

Discovery was pushed into service for the military flight while technicians worked to repair Challenger. But unexpected problems developed, throwing engineers behind schedule.

"We're not ready to throw in the towel on the next launch date yet or anything like that, but we are getting a lot of work right here at the end," said NASA tile expert Horace Lamberth.

"In all honesty, our back is up against the wall right now in getting out of the (hangar) in time to make the Feb. 20 launch," he said, "but I still think we're in good shape to make the window. It's about a seven or eight-day window."

The shuttle's tile system is a sandwich-like affair that protects the ship from the heat of re-entry.

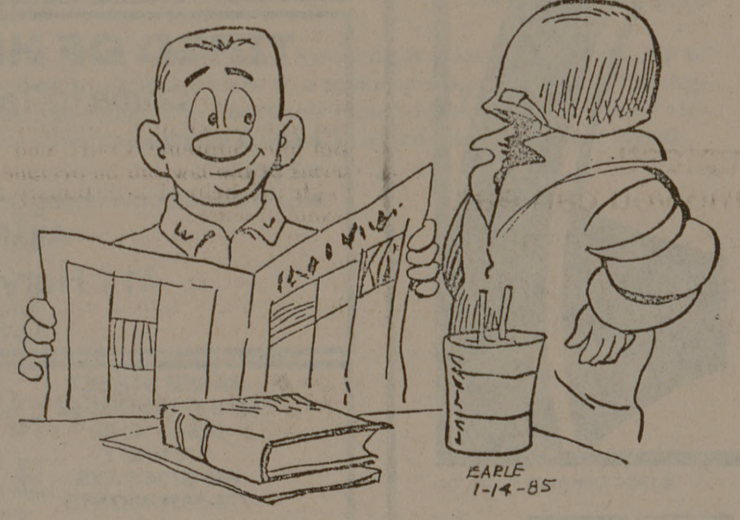
Tiles are bonded to special pads and the pads are glued to the shuttle's airframe or to a material called screed that is used to smooth out rough areas on the airframe.

Scientists believe the repeated use of a waterproofing agent called Silane caused the original degradation of the screed layer noted in November.

Tests indicate that ammonia in the injected Silane reacted with moisture trapped in the screed to produce ammonium hydroxide, which is known to weaken screed.

A replacement waterproofing technique has not been approved yet and the next three shuttle missions will rely on the less efficient but reliable Scotchgard.

**Slouch** By Jim Earle



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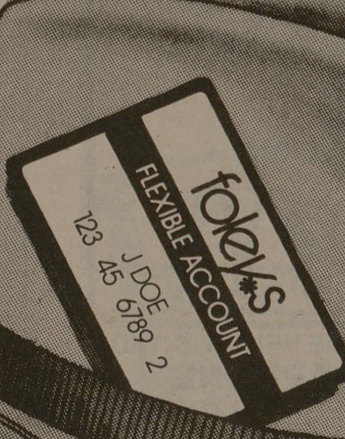
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