

Federal funding for AIDS drug may end soon

AUSTIN (AP) — A federally funded program that supplies the drug AZT to people with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and the AIDS related complex, ARC, is in jeopardy of ending next month, Texas Department of Health officials said.

The department announced Monday that the program, which has supplied azidothymidine, would end unless new federal funds become available after Sept. 30.

To be eligible, recipients must not be otherwise covered by Medicaid or private health insurance.

AZT is the only federally approved drug shown to slow the progress of AIDS.

The state received \$1.8 million in federal funds this year to buy the drug for some 300 people.

Shuttle crew simulates flight scheduled for fall

SPACE CENTER, HOUSTON (AP) — The five Discovery astronauts worked through a simulated failure of their craft's right engine Tuesday, bringing the craft successfully into a low orbit in their final long-duration rehearsal.

About 300 people at Johnson Space Center began the 56-hour simulation of mission STS-26, a four-day flight that will mark the first launch of a NASA space shuttle in more than 2½ years.

"The first thing after launch, when they were going into orbit, the right engine failed so that they had to do what's called 'abort to orbit,'" NASA spokesman Barbara Selby said.

"That means the shuttle can still make it into orbit, but lower than planned, so they have to adjust their

activities," Selby said. "They did achieve the ATO, as we call it, and made the necessary adjustments to continue the mission."

The shuttle crew later was to face its second major test, the deployment of the \$100 million communications satellite.

Commander Rick Hauck, pilot Richard Covey and mission specialists David Hilmers, Mike Lounge and George "Pinky" Nelson were expected to face about 150 simulated problems during the lengthy test.

But the first problem of the day wasn't simulated. The scheduled 8 a.m. test got off to a late start because of a malfunction in the shuttle simulator, but the problem was corrected and countdown ended at 9:04 a.m., spokesman Bill Green said.

As many as 200 others are taking

part in the rehearsal in New Mexico and California, along with flight and ground crews at Johnson Space Center, spokesman Brian Welch said.

"The people who do the simulation, the 'sim' supervisors, sort of wage a mental battle with the flight controllers," Welch said. "They will do everything they can to make it more difficult. They try to throw a problem at each major (flight) system."

The rehearsal was scheduled to end by 5 p.m. Thursday, and a full day of debriefing will follow, Welch said.

The actual launch of the shuttle Discovery is slated for late September or early October if sluggish oxygen valves and a hydrogen leak are repaired in time, according to National Aeronautics and Space Administration officials.

Driver claims he was not asleep at time of van's crash with tractor-trailer truck

DALLAS (AP) — The driver of a Midland Boys Club van which was struck by a tractor-trailer Aug. 12, killing five children, said he wasn't asleep at the time of the crash.

A day after the crash, a state trooper said he thought Damon Polk, 23, had been exhausted from getting up early and driving most of the day in hot weather, and that he had nodded off while trying to pass the truck.

Polk, in his first interview since the accident, told the *Dallas Times Herald* that such speculation was "completely false."

Polk was quoted in Tuesday's editions as saying the truck "ran into us" as he steered back onto the highway after trying to dislodge a soft drink bottle from beneath the accelerator.

"If the truck had slowed down to let us back onto the road, there wouldn't have been an accident," Polk said in his first news conference since the accident.

A report filed last week by the Texas Department

of Public Safety said two reasons for the crash were: "Distraction in the vehicle and faulty evasive action."

No charges have been filed in connection with the accident.

The van was returning to Midland from Abilene with 14 youths and three adults who had been attending a softball tournament.

"I was awake and alert," Polk, a former track star whose legs remain paralyzed, told the newspaper from his room at Methodist Hospital in Lubbock.

"And I never lost control of the van. What happened was this: I had just passed a car and was in the left hand lane. I was going between 65 and 68 mph. The Coke truck was behind us, also in the left lane. Then a Dr Pepper bottle rolled up under the accelerator, partly under the pedal and partly under my foot.

"I was holding the steering wheel with my right hand and reaching down with my left to get the bottle. I guess I was looking down too much and we went off the road."

The van pulled off to the left onto the grassy median of Interstate 20, Polk said.

"I grabbed the wheel," he said, "but I didn't want to mash on the brakes, because I didn't want the kids to be thrown on the floor. So I got us going straight and then eased back onto the highway. That's when the truck hit us."

Polk said the rig struck the van in the rear on the right side. Police said the 18-wheeler dragged the smaller vehicle about 150 yards.

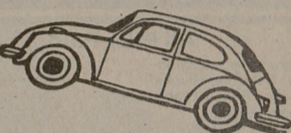
After the wreck, Polk said, "...the van was upright but the roof had been stripped off. I tried to turn around to see how the kids were but I couldn't move."

After being rescued, Polk said, "I knew by looking at the van that somebody had died."

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