

# NASA's next shuttle will practice repair techniques

By Marcia Dunn  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SPACE CENTER, Houston — NASA said Monday that when shuttle launches resume sometime next year, the first mission will essentially be a test flight, with astronauts inspecting their ship and practicing repair techniques to guard against another Columbia-type disaster.

The space agency considered flying the minimum number of astronauts and keeping the mission as short as possible. But NASA decided to go with a full set of six or seven astronauts on a normal-length mission of about a week and a half to perform some overdue repair work at the international space station.

"If we're going to go through all this risk to get there and do that, we ought to go ahead and make sure that we do some of those things that are important to the international space station because if we don't do those things, it raises the risk of the station," said Bill Parsons, the new shuttle program manager.

No firm launch date has been set for the next shuttle, Atlantis. But in all likelihood, it will not deliver a fresh crew to the space station as originally intended.

Instead, the focus will be on inspecting the shuttle for exterior damage, using cameras on both the shuttle and space station, and practicing repair techniques.

Other objectives, like delivering supplies to the space station, will take a back seat, said William Readdy, a former shuttle commander who is now NASA's top spaceflight official.

Readdy said the next flight may not represent as much of a shakedown as the first shuttle trip in 1981, a two-day mission by

Columbia and just two pilots.

But he noted: "This is really and truly a developmental test flight getting back to building and assembling the space station" and implementing all 15 of the Columbia accident board's recommendations required for return to flight.

NASA has yet to settle on all the details of an emergency rescue plan.

But in a 156-page return-to-flight report issued Monday, the space agency said it is looking at using the space station as an emergency shelter for stranded shuttle astronauts and considering having another spacecraft ready to blast off on a rescue mission.

**"We will be safety-driven and not schedule-driven."**

— William Readdy  
NASA spaceflight official

"Our first line of defense is: Don't have any debris come off and strike the shuttle. The second line is to have inspection techniques and repair capabilities so we can come home safely," Parsons said.

The release of NASA's initial return-to-flight plan comes two weeks after the Columbia Accident Investigation Board concluded that a stray piece of insulating foam and a broken safety culture were responsible for the shuttle's destruction on Feb. 1. All seven astronauts were killed.

Readdy stressed that the plan is "a living document" that will evolve in the coming weeks and

months.

Some NASA officials have talked about resuming shuttle flights as early as March, but most have said privately that next summer would be a more realistic estimate.

"Whether that turns out to be March or April or May or June or July, so be it. We will be safety-driven and not schedule-driven," Readdy said.

The biggest challenge, officials said, will be to come up with a repair for the vulnerable carbon panels that protect the leading edges of the shuttle wings. The leading edge of Columbia's left wing suffered a 6- to 10-inch hole from being hit with the foam.

NASA is looking for outside help in coming up with a leading-edge patch capable of withstanding the thousands of degrees of re-entry heat.

Atlantis will be launched in daylight to ensure good camera views of the foam insulation on the external fuel tank and any debris hitting the spaceship. Readdy said shuttles will be restricted to daylight liftoffs for the foreseeable future.

As for the newly ordered inspections, the astronauts will connect an extension boom to the end of the shuttle's 50-foot robot arm and check the underside of the wings and the ship's belly for damage. Cameras and lasers will be mounted on the end of the boom; the lasers will measure the depth of any gashes.

Readdy and other officials said they do not know yet how much all the improvements will cost.

As for the steps necessary to fix NASA's broken culture, those will take longer and require help from outside experts, Readdy said.

# Teen tanning rates 'alarming'

By Lindsey Tanner  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — A study found that nearly a third of white teenage girls in the United States have used tanning booths at least three times, suggesting an alarming number of teens are ignoring the dangers of skin cancer for the sake of sporting a good tan.

Twenty-eight percent of teenage girls and 7 percent of boys reported using tanning booths three or more times, the nationally representative study found. Forty-seven percent of girls aged 18 and 19 reported use that frequent.

"Teenagers may think they look good now, but the sad part is that by the time they reach 60, their skin will look like a leather bag and they'll be paying a dermatologist to try to reverse the damage," said Dr. Ted Daly, director of pediatric dermatology at Nassau University Medical Center in New York, who was not involved in the study.

The study and an accompanying editorial appear in the September issue of Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, published Monday.

The Case Western Reserve University researchers analyzed data from 6,903 white teens who answered questions in a separate national survey on adolescent health in 1996.

Indoor tanning was most popular in the Midwest, where sunny weather is limited, and the South, where heat and humidity might make outdoor tanning uncomfortable.

The study's lead author, Case Western researcher Catherine Demko, said there's evidence that indoor tanning might contribute to the risk for malignant melanoma, the most serious kind of skin cancer.

Indoor tanners also were more likely to smoke, drink or use marijuana than paler adolescents, the researchers said.

"Tan skin beats a healthy vampire glow every time," said Dr. Robert Dellavalle, a Denver dermatologist. He wrote an accompanying editorial proposing a \$20 tax per tanning session for kids under 18, which he said might help curb demand and increase funds for more skin cancer awareness campaigns.

"Since youth represents an especially critical period during which UV radiation increases skin cancer risk, altering tanning behavior of minors is a prime target of skin cancer prevention efforts," Dellavalle said.

Many teens are attracted to tanning booths because salons promote them as being safer than natural sunlight, which isn't true, Daly said.

"An occasional visit to the tanning booth may not be so bad, but teens should not go on a weekly basis or over the long-term," he said.

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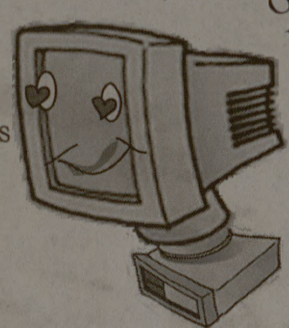
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