

NASA gives 'Go' for Space Shuttle launch

by UPI

WASHINGTON - NASA senior managers completed a review Wednesday of space shuttle Atlantis' readiness for flight. Pending closure of an issue with a shuttle radiator hose, the STS-122 mission will launch Feb. 7 at 2:45 p.m. EST. During an inspection of Atlantis Tuesday, one of four hoses that carry Freon to the shuttle radiators in the payload bay was found bent and not properly retracted in its storage box. The others were fully retracted into their storage boxes, as expected. Teams are continuing to gather data and assess any potential forward work. Managers will convene Saturday to further review and analyze what, if any, remaining work is required before launch. During the 11-day mission, Commander Steve Frick and his six crewmates will install the European Space Agency's new Columbus laboratory on the International Space Station. Columbus will expand the research facilities of the station and provide scientists around the world with the ability to conduct a variety of life, physical and materials science experiments. The mission will include three spacewalks, delivery of a new crew member to the station and the return of another astronaut after nearly four months aboard the complex. Atlantis' launch date was announced at the conclusion of Wednesday's executive-level Flight Readiness Review. The one-day video teleconference meeting was led from NASA Headquarters in Washington. Top NASA and contractor managers assessed any risks associated with the mission and determined whether the shuttle's equipment, support systems and procedures are ready for flight. The first executive-level Flight Readiness Review for STS-122 was held Nov. 30. The STS-122 mission was delayed in December 2007 after failures occurred in a fuel sensor system while Atlantis' external fuel tank was being filled. A tanking, or fueling, test on Dec. 18, 2007, revealed that open circuits in the external tank's feed through connector were the most likely cause of false readings in the system during launch attempts on Dec. 6 and Dec. 9. A modified connector was designed with pins and sockets soldered together. Both the original and modified connector configurations were subjected to testing that verified that the new design corrects the open circuits found in the original connector. The sensor system is one of several that protect the shuttle's main engines by triggering their shut down if fuel runs unexpectedly low. NASA's current Launch Commit Criteria require that three of the four engine cutoff, or ECO, sensors function properly before liftoff from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Joining Commander Frick on STS-122 will be pilot Alan Poindexter and mission specialists Leland Melvin, Rex Walheim, Stanley Love and European Space Agency astronauts Hans Schlegel and Leopold Eyharts. Eyharts will replace current station crew member Dan Tani, who has lived on the outpost since October. Eyharts will return to Earth on shuttle Endeavour's STS-123 mission, currently targeted for launch on March 11, 2008.

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