

NASA gives "Go" for space shuttle launch on June 8

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. - On Thursday, NASA senior managers selected June 8 as the official launch date for space shuttle Atlantis. Commander Rick Sturckow and his six crewmates are scheduled to lift off at 7:38 p.m. EDT on the STS-117 mission to the International Space Station. During the 11-day mission and three spacewalks, the crew will work with flight controllers at NASA's Johnson Space Center, Houston, to install a 17-ton segment on the station's girder-like truss and deploy a set of solar arrays. The mission will increase the International Space Station's power capability in preparation for the arrival of new science modules from the European and Japanese space agencies.

Atlantis' launch date was announced at the Flight Readiness Review. During the two-day meeting, top NASA and contractor managers assess any risks associated with the mission and determine whether the shuttle's equipment, support systems and procedures are ready for flight. The first Flight Readiness Review for STS-117 was held Feb. 27-28. A hail storm on Feb. 26, however, damaged Atlantis' external fuel tank and delayed the planned mid-March launch. "While we cannot control the weather, this team can ensure that when we do launch, it will be as safely as possible," said Associate Administrator for Space Operations Bill Gerstenmaier, who chaired the meetings. "This second Flight Readiness Review was as thorough as the first. The discussions were open, healthy, and are evidence of a team that is ready for a complicated and important station assembly mission." Joining Commander Sturckow on STS-117 will be Pilot Lee Archambault and mission specialists Patrick Forrester, Steven Swanson, John "Danny" Olivas, Jim Reilly and Clayton Anderson. Anderson will replace current station crew member Sunita Williams, who has lived on the station since December. Williams will return to Earth on Atlantis.

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