

# Atlantis Won't Be Launched Before Foam Problem Solved: NASA Chief

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NASA Administrator Mike Griffin reiterated Tuesday that the US space agency will not launch shuttle Atlantis if the problem of insulation foam remain unsolved.

Speaking at a press conference at Kennedy Space Center following the successful landing of space shuttle Discovery, the US space agency chief also said the issue of protruding gap fillers is another technical problem that "was of annoying concern."

NASA was very worried about the problem, which the agency has not found the reason yet and is sure to occur again in future shuttle flights.

Atlantis was originally scheduled to fly into the space between Sept. 9 and 24 but NASA repeatedly stressed that can't not be done if there is no solution to the foam problem, which caused the Columbia to fall apart two and a half years ago.

Griffin stressed that his agency will "try as hard as we can" to solve the problem.

When asked about current conditions of Discovery, the official said preliminary results of the survey on damages of the shuttle will be available only after several hours.

Griffin noted that the latest mission was not only a "return flight," but also a test flight from which "we learned a lot."

Both Griffin and other NASA officials hailed Discovery's mission as a successful one.

"It's a great day and it's a fantastic and successful flight in many ways," NASA Space Shuttle Program Manager Bill Parsons told the press conference.

Griffin described the mission as a "successful teamwork" and "every single task is complex."

He especially complimented Discovery Commander Eileen Collins and her crew.

"I think the crew performed fantastically well.....I'm thinking about resigning my position in favor of Eileen Collins," joked Griffin.

He then extended his congratulations to the International Space Station and Space Shuttle teams that worked on the mission.

Discovery spent two weeks in space, where the crew demonstrated new methods to inspect and repair the shuttle in orbit.

The crew also delivered supplies, outfitted and performed maintenance on the International Space Station. A number of these tasks were conducted during three spacewalks.

In an unprecedented event, spacewalkers were called upon to remove protruding gap fillers from the heat shield on Discovery's underbelly.

In other spacewalk activities, astronauts installed an external platform onto the Space Station's Quest Airlock and replaced one of the orbital outpost's Control Moment Gyroscopes.

Discovery was launched on July 26 and spent almost 14 days on orbit before landing at Edwards Air Force Base in California at 1212 GMT Tuesday.

The mission was the first shuttle flight since Columbia was destroyed two and a half years ago.

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