

Internal report critical of shuttle foam

August 4 2005

An internal NASA report, which did not warn against the Discovery launch, did warn of the way insulating foam had been applied to sections of the fuel tank.

The December report, given to the New York Times by a person outside the space agency concerned about shuttle safety, was critical of the quality control and practices at the Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, managed by Lockheed Martin.

The 23-page report said it was obvious Lockheed's external tank engineers "did not do a thorough job" of identifying the quirks and variations that can occur when foam is applied by hand and its reluctance to re-evaluate the quality-control problems "stems from the 'schedule-first' attitude" of Lockheed Martin management.

The report was written by Conley Perry, a retired NASA division chief for quality engineering at the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

"This variable could reasonably be eliminated and yet it continues," said the report.

A point-by-point response to the report had been prepared but could not be released because the information was subject to confidentiality rules, said David Mould, the NASA's assistant administrator for public affairs.

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Citation: Internal report critical of shuttle foam (2005, August 4) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-08-internal-critical-shuttle-foam.html>

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