

NASA considers second emergency spacewalk

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The successful emergency spacewalk by a shuttle Discovery astronaut Wednesday might soon be followed by the world's second such emergency repair mission.

Astronaut Steve Robinson easily removed by hand two pieces of protruding cloth -- called gap fillers -- from Discovery's belly in a meticulously planned spacewalk.

The emergency repair was ordered after NASA engineers were unable to determine whether the protruding pieces of cloth would be potentially dangerous when space shuttle re-enters Earth's atmosphere.

Removal of the gap fillers was not the only repair work that might be on the agenda during the shuttle's 13-day mission, the New York Times reported.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration scientists were studying the risks that might be posed by a damaged thermal insulation blanket located near the window on the commander's side of the Discovery.

The blanket was damaged when it apparently was struck by insulating foam that came off the shuttle's external fuel tank during the July 26 launch.

The deputy manager of the shuttle program, N. Wayne Hale, said scientists must determine whether the blanket would pose a risk if it were to dislodge during re-entry.

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