

Cloth pieces on shuttle may need repair

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NASA experts disagree on whether loose "gap fillers," pieces of cloth protruding from space shuttle Discovery's orbiter, could be dangerous during re-entry.

A spacewalk might be necessary to determine whether the fillers could cause uneven heating when Discovery re-enters the earth's atmosphere -- and to try to ascertain the hazard level that might pose to the crew, the New York Times reported.

Discovery flight director Paul Hill said while a spacewalk is unlikely, it might be the only way to rid the craft of the cloth. Gap fillers are used to allow the shuttle to give and bend due to exposure to extreme temperatures.

Some experts are more concerned than others, Hill said during a press conference Sunday. He said the requisite data would not be available until Monday.

If a spacewalk were needed to fix the problem, it could happen on Wednesday, as astronauts will be out adding an equipment cabinet to the airlock system.

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