

Soyuz Missions May Double By 2009 - Energia Chief

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The number of launches of the manned Russian spacecraft Soyuz may double by 2009, the manufacturing company's chief told a press conference Saturday, reports RIA Novosti.

Speaking to reporters after the supply vehicle Progress M54's successful rendezvous with the International Space Station (ISS), Energia CEO Nikolai Sevastyanov said Soyuz now carries out two missions per year, but that the number will likely be increased to four later in the decade when the frequency of U.S. space shuttles' flights goes down.

Asked how the ISS will be kept going after NASA puts its shuttle flights on hold, Sevastyanov said the American side will have to increase funding if it expects Russia to service the station single-handedly.

The Energia chief said the next Progress mission to the ISS is scheduled for December 2005. He also confirmed reports that Russia's Federal Space Agency (Rosaviakosmos) has approached the government with a proposal to have several Soyuz and Progress craft on standby at the Baikonur cosmodrome to cope with emergencies.

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