

NASA seeks \$5 billion more for shuttles

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NASA needs about \$5 billion more than previously budgeted to operate the space shuttle before the program ends in 2010, said the agency's director.

Michael D. Griffin, the agency administrator, testifying Thursday before the House Science Committee, said the cost of operating the shuttle fleet before it is scheduled to retire in five years was higher than expected, The New York Times reported Friday.

Griffin said "painful choices" might be needed if the National Aeronautics and Space Administration is to fulfill President George W. Bush's plan to send people back to the moon before 2020.

NASA has planned cutting half its planned space station research,

reducing a program to develop nuclear power for space applications and delaying space astronomy missions.

Griffin said agency engineers are confident that they now understand why large pieces of insulating foam fell from the shuttle's external fuel tank during last summer's mission and that they believe they can prevent a recurrence.

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