

# Foam removed for May shuttle launch

February 19 2006

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The next NASA crew to fly a shuttle mission took questions from reporters about their scheduled May liftoff and the dangers since the Columbia tragedy.

Air Force Col. Steven W. Lindsey, the commander of the shuttle Discovery, told a news conference at the Kennedy Space Center Friday changes have been made to ensure as little foam loss as possible.

A 1.7-pound piece of foam insulating the external fuel tank broke off Columbia as it took off in February 2003.

That damaged the left wing, which led to the shuttle breaking apart upon reentry to Earth 16 days later, killing all on board, The New York Times reported.

The space program was put on hold to investigate the problem, until Discovery's launch in the summer of 2005.

Another piece of foam broke off, raising concern of another reentry tragedy, which never materialized. NASA has removed foam from the suspect area.

The upcoming Discovery launch will take a European astronaut to the space station as well as needed supplies. The seven astronauts also will conduct three spacewalks.

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