

# Shuttle Crew in Florida for Launch

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(AP) -- Space shuttle Discovery's crew of seven arrived at the Kennedy Space Center on Tuesday for this weekend's launch, a day after a top NASA engineer who praised his colleagues for voicing doubts about the wisdom of going ahead with the flight was removed from his job.

Charlie Camarda said in an e-mail to colleagues Monday that he was forced out as chief of the engineering directorate at the Johnson Space Center and that he had been offered another position working for NASA's Engineering and Safety Center.

He did not offer a specific reason for his removal, and a NASA spokesman would not comment on Camarda's departure.

Discovery is scheduled to lift off on Saturday. At a high-level flight-readiness meeting earlier this month, NASA's top safety and engineering officers recommended against a launch until further design changes are made to the external fuel tank to prevent foam from breaking off and hitting the shuttle - the very problem that doomed Columbia in 2003.

But the two officials were overruled by NASA Administrator Michael Griffin, who said that there was no risk to the crew members since they could use the international space station as a safe haven if Discovery were damaged by foam during liftoff.

The Discovery mission would be just the second shuttle flight since the Columbia disaster that killed seven astronauts.

In the e-mail, Camarda praised his colleagues for voicing their opposition to launching Discovery without further changes, though he did not say precisely where he stood on the question.

"I cannot be a party to rumor, innuendo, gossip and/or manipulation to make or break someone's career and/or good name," Camarda said in the e-mail. "I refused to abandon my position on the (mission management team), and asked that if I would not be allowed to work this mission that I would have to be fired from my position and I was."

The e-mail was first reported by Florida Today and the Houston Chronicle. Camarda did not respond to a request for an interview Tuesday, and nobody answered the phone at his Houston home.

NASA spokesman James Hartsfield said he could not comment on Camarda's departure but added that open communication on safety was encouraged during the flight-readiness meeting.

Camarda's replacement was Steve Altemus, former deputy director of

the engineering directorate, which provides engineering design, development and testing for space flight programs in Houston.

Discovery's seven-member crew, led by Steve Lindsey, arrived at the Kennedy Space Center in five T-38 training jets Tuesday morning. Lindsey said he was optimistic the shuttle would get off the ground as scheduled on Saturday.

"We've been training for an awfully long time," he said. "We're as prepared as we're ever going to be."

*By MIKE SCHNEIDER, Associated Press Writer*

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