

Space missions become more challenging

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NASA says it is about to embark on a series of space flights as difficult as any in history in order to complete the International Space Station.

"The flights ahead will be the most complex and challenging we've ever carried out for construction of the International Space Station in orbit," said Mike Suffredini, NASA station program manager. "The station literally becomes a new spacecraft with each assembly mission, and that will be true starting this year with dramatic changes in its cooling and power systems, habitable volume, utilization capability as well as its appearance."

Later this year, the station and shuttle crews will face a unique challenge in activating a permanent cooling system and new power sources. They must rewire the orbiting laboratory and change its electrical supplies without interrupting the continuous operation of any of its critical systems.

"The assembly of the station on these flights has no parallel in space history," Suffredini said. "We know they will be hard, and we may encounter the unexpected. But we are eager to get started, and there is tremendous excitement building in NASA and among our international partners."

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