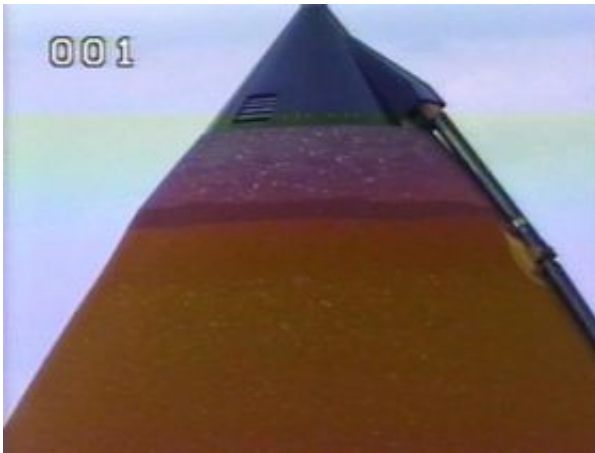


Hail damages Atlantis space shuttle's external fuel tank

February 27 2007, By Jim Wilson



A strong thunderstorm with hail damages Atlantis space shuttle's external fuel tank. A remote camera view of the external tank with hail marks. Credit: NASA/KSC

A strong thunderstorm with hail passed through NASA's Kennedy Space Center launch complex area about 5 p.m. EST Monday. The remote cameras indicate some damage to the external tank, but a full assessment on the scene is just getting underway due to the pad being closed for fuel loading.

The two-day Flight Readiness Review at NASA's Kennedy Space Center will continue in parallel with Kennedy Ground Operations assessment of the external tank damage. The Flight Readiness Review board will be

briefed midday Wednesday.

"Right now, the big deal is how many divots? How deep are they? Can they be repaired at the pad? Can they not be repaired at the pad?" NASA spokesman Bill Johnson said.

Before each mission, the review is conducted by top-level NASA officials, space shuttle program managers, engineers and contractors approximately two weeks prior to the opening of the launch window. They examine the readiness of the space shuttle, flight crew and payloads to determine if everything is set to proceed for launch.

The Atlantis flight crew will return to Kennedy a few days before the launch of mission STS-117 to the International Space Station, targeted for March 15.

During the 11-day mission, the six-member crew will install a new truss segment, retract a set of solar arrays and unfold a new set on the starboard side of the station. Lessons learned from two previous missions will provide the astronauts with new techniques and tools to perform their duties.

Commanding the STS-117 crew is Rick Sturckow, a veteran of two shuttle missions (STS-88, STS-105), while Lee Archambault will be making his first flight as the shuttle's pilot. Mission Specialists James Reilly (STS-89, STS-104) and Patrick Forrester (STS-105) will be returning to the station. Steven Swanson and John Olivas, both mission specialists, join the crew for their first flight into space.

Source: NASA

Citation: Hail damages Atlantis space shuttle's external fuel tank (2007, February 27) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-02-hail-atlantis-space-shuttle-external.html>

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