

Atlantis Tank Repairs Under Way

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In highbay 1 inside the Vehicle Assembly Building, technicians begin to carefully sand away the red dye that has been applied to the external tank to help expose cracks or compression dents. Photo credit: NASA/Jim Grossman

Space Shuttle Atlantis is in the Vehicle Assembly Building for assessment and repairs due to a late February thunderstorm with hail.

Workers positioned platforms around the shuttle to allow for inspections and repairs to hail-damaged areas. Some foam sanding has begun in the nose cone area of the tank.

Inspections are finished for the solid rocket boosters and nearly complete for the orbiter, with 20 of 28 hail-damaged areas, all on the left side of the vehicle, already repaired.

A new target launch date has not been determined, but teams will focus

on preparing Atlantis for liftoff in late April.

Mission STS-117 to the International Space Station will be scheduled sometime after a Russian Soyuz spacecraft returns from the station. The Soyuz is delivering new station crew members and returning others to Earth in late April. Adequate time is needed between the Soyuz undocking and the shuttle's arrival to the station.

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.

Atlantis Commander Rick Sturckow, Pilot Lee Archambault and Mission Specialists Jim Reilly, Patrick Forrester, Steven Swanson and John "Danny" Olivas will continue training at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston as they await a new target launch date.

The STS-117 flight crew will return to Kennedy Space Center a few days before launch.

Source: NASA

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