

NASA to set final STS-120 launch date

October 15 2007

A final decision is expected this week regarding the launch date for space shuttle Discovery's next mission to the International Space Station.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration managers are to meet Tuesday at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida to conduct a final readiness review for the upcoming flight. The STS-120 mission is targeted for launch Oct. 23.

Shuttle program managers met for two days last week and among topics discussed were the reinforced carbon-carbon coating on panels positioned at the leading edge of Discovery's wing. There have been indications the edges of a couple of panels have lost small amounts of their upper-level coating.

NASA's Engineering and Safety Center has recommended replacing three of Discovery's 44 panels -- a move that would require postponing the launch. Critics of that decision, however, note the shuttle has flown at least twice with the panels in the current condition, and with no indications of degradation.

A final decision on that matter and a firm launch date are expected to be determined during Tuesday's meeting.

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