

Repairs delay Discovery's final launch another day

October 30 2010, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



The crew of space shuttle Discovery, from left, mission specialists Nicole Stott, Michael Barratt, pilot Eric Boe, mission specialists Tim Kopra and Alvin Drew and commander Steve Lindsey after arriving at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Thursday, Oct. 28, 2010. Discovery is scheduled to launch Nov. 1. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

(AP) -- Last-minute leak repairs have again pushed back space shuttle Discovery's final launch, this time until Wednesday.

NASA delayed Discovery's flight to the International Space Station yet another day because more work was needed than initially thought to replace a pair of leaking pipe hookups near the shuttle's tail, NASA test director Jeff Spaulding said Saturday.

The problem cropped up earlier in the week, forcing NASA to give up on the original Monday launch attempt and aim instead for Tuesday. That one-day slip to Election Day - which was announced Friday - had officials in neighboring communities worried about the massive traffic jams that might result from hordes of launch spectators and residents trying to vote.

Spaulding said the latest delay gives shuttle team members "a little bit more breathing room" to get to the polls. Space agency managers had been urging workers to vote early to avoid interfering with work.

"We always want to make it as uncomplicated as possible for our team, and be able to get them home" in between launch attempts so they can rest up, Spaulding told reporters. "If that move helps that in any way, certainly that's a good thing."

Spaulding said the repairs and subsequent leak checks are expected to be done in time for a Wednesday launch attempt. Technicians had to replace two bad couplings, or attachment points, in the helium and nitrogen gas lines. The parts are notorious for leaking.

"Right now, we look like we're on a good path to get there," he said.

Discovery and a crew of six will deliver a pressurized compartment full of supplies to the space station. Among the equipment: an experimental humanoid robot. Two spacewalks are planned for the 11-day mission.

This will be Discovery's 39th and final mission. NASA is retiring the shuttle fleet next year.

NASA has until Nov. 7 to launch Discovery. Otherwise the flight will be pushed to December because of unacceptable sun angles.

Forecasters say there is a 70 percent chance of good launch weather Wednesday. Liftoff time will be 3:52 p.m.

More information: NASA:

<http://www.nasa.gov/mission-pages/shuttle/main/index.html>

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