

Last space shuttle crew practices for July launch

June 22 2011, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer

(AP) -- The four astronauts who will bid goodbye to the space shuttle program are practicing for their July 8 launch.

Commander Christopher Ferguson and his crew met with journalists Wednesday morning at the [launch pad](#). They will board Atlantis on Thursday for a mock countdown.

Astronaut Rex Walheim says he gets goosebumps, thinking that Atlantis will blast off one final time in just a couple more weeks. The mission is the last of NASA's 30-year shuttle program.

Atlantis got a new fuel valve this week. The old one showed a possible leak last week when the [external fuel tank](#) was filled to check for cracking. So far, the 50 reinforced brackets on the tank show no signs of cracks. The new valve, meanwhile, will be tested this weekend.

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Citation: Last space shuttle crew practices for July launch (2011, June 22) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-space-shuttle-crew-july.html>

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