

Debris threat avoided at space station: NASA

July 11 2011, by Kerry Sheridan

[A piece of Soviet space debris](#) is not likely to collide with the International Space Station after all, and astronauts have moved ahead with restocking the orbiting lab, NASA said Monday.

The US space agency said it was tracking the space junk on Sunday, shortly after the [shuttle Atlantis](#) docked on its final mission, and warned that a maneuver with the shuttle's [thrusters](#) might be necessary to avoid it.

But those concerns were alleviated on Monday when the agency determined the two were not on a collision course after all.

"Mission Control says the [space debris](#) is not going to come close to the space station -- no need for an avoidance maneuver," [NASA](#) said in a message on the microblogging site Twitter.

More details were expected to be released at a press conference later Monday. NASA has said such events are not uncommon and that 500,000 such objects are being tracked in the Earth's orbit.

This particular piece of [space junk](#) was part of Cosmos 375, a satellite launched in 1970 by the former Soviet Union and which collided with another satellite and broke apart.

Meanwhile, the four US astronauts who arrived aboard Atlantis began work with their six colleagues at the ISS to transfer a year's worth of food and spare parts to the orbiting outpost.

Other supply ships from Europe, Japan and Russia will be able to stock the ISS when the [shuttle program](#) retires after Atlantis's mission, but the amount of cargo space available aboard the shuttle is unparalleled.

The Raffaello multipurpose logistics module was lifted out of the shuttle's cargo bay and placed with the help of a Canadian robotic arm onto the space station's Harmony node at 6:46 am (1046 GMT), NASA said.

The container is "packed with 9,403 pounds (4,265 kilograms) of spare parts, spare equipment, and other supplies -- including 2,677 pounds (1,215 kilograms) of food -- that will sustain space station operations for a year," NASA said.

"Over the next several days, crew members will spend nearly 130 person-hours transferring items from Raffaello into the station and more than 5,600 pounds of discarded station gear into Raffaello for return to Earth."

Atlantis's flight marks the end of an era for NASA, leaving Americans with no actively operating government-run human spaceflight program and no method for sending astronauts to space until private industry comes up with a new capsule, likely by 2015 at the earliest.

With the shuttle gone, only Russia's three-seat Soyuz capsules will be capable of carrying [astronauts](#) to the ISS at a cost of more than \$50 million per seat.

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