

# Special wake-up for Atlantis from shuttle workers

July 9 2011, By SETH BORENSTEIN , AP Science Writer

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After some last-minute suspense over the weather and a piece of launch-pad equipment, Atlantis and its four astronauts blasted off practically on schedule at 11:29 a.m., Friday July 8, 2011 pierced a shroud of clouds and settled flawlessly into orbit in front of a crowd estimated at close to 1 million, the size of the throng that watched Apollo 11 shoot the moon in 1969. (AP Photo/Robert Ray)

(AP) -- Usually space shuttle astronauts are awakened in orbit by a song sent by a loved one. But not much is routine for the final space shuttle flight, not even a wake-up call.

Saturday morning's wake-up song - Coldplay's "Viva la Vida" - was accompanied by a mass greeting from the numerous employees of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala. That center is in charge of the [propulsion system](#) that sends shuttles into space. Thousands of [space shuttle](#) workers throughout the country have been laid off or will lose their jobs not long after Atlantis returns to Earth.

"Good morning, Atlantis," the workers said in a message recorded before launch. "The Marshall Space Flight Center hopes you enjoyed your ride to orbit. We wish you a successful mission and a safe return home."

Pilot Doug Hurley responded, "Thanks for that great message and awesome ride to orbit and the 134 before that with this tremendous [space shuttle program](#)."

The unusually small Atlantis crew of four astronauts started its first full day in orbit checking the space shuttle's delicate heat shield for any damage from Friday's launch.

Astronauts will use the shuttle's [robot arm](#) and an extension to slowly examine the most vulnerable parts of the shuttle's outer edges. In 2003, the [space shuttle Columbia](#) was destroyed when it returned to Earth because of damage during liftoff.

The astronauts are making quick work of the six-hour job, putting off their lunch and earning raves from Mission Control.

"It's really a pleasure watching you guys work today; you're half an hour ahead of time," spaceflight communicator Steve Robinson told the crew.

There was no apparent damage from first views. NASA reports no problems on the shuttle. Mission managers are close to being able to

extend the shuttle flight from 12 days to 13 days, needing to find just one more hour of on-orbit power to put off landing until July 21. That is usually accomplished by [conserving energy](#) on board.

On Sunday at 11:07 a.m. EDT, Atlantis will dock with the International Space Station to deliver more than four tons of supplies. The flight of Atlantis is the final space [shuttle mission](#) as NASA ends the 30-year program to pursue a new path in space exploration.

**More information:** NASA: <http://www.nasa.gov/shuttle>

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