

Space freighter starts suicide plunge: ESA

October 2 2012



NASA image shows the International Space Station in 2005. A bus-sized craft that had delivered food to the International Space Station will re-enter Earth's atmosphere overnight for a controlled implosion over the South Pacific, the European Space Agency said Tuesday.

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The [automated transfer vehicle](#) (ATV) undocked from the ISS last Friday after a six-month visit.

Its undocking was delayed by three days because [astronauts](#) had sent the craft a wrong identification code.

Named after a 20th-century Italian physicist, the Edoardo Amaldi will exit its ISS orbit at 2142 GMT on Tuesday, firing its engines for 14 minutes to place it on an Earth-bound suicide mission.

At 0042 GMT the craft will fire its engines again, this time for a second, 15-minute "deorbit burn"—and will start falling to Earth about 20 minutes later.

Impact of the debris surviving the atmospheric [burnout](#) is scheduled for 0130 GMT, according to an ESA blog.

The Edoardo Amaldi is the third of five ATVs that the space agency is providing for the ISS project.

The robot craft, each the size of a London double-decker bus, are designed to make one-way trips to the space station, hauling up tonnes of food, water, air, equipment and other supplies for the three people on board.

The ATVs also use on-board engines to give boosts to the ISS, whose altitude drops because it is in low orbit and dragged down by lingering atmospheric molecules.

At the end of their trip, laden with rubbish and human waste, the craft detach and burn up in a controlled destruction over the ocean.

The final two ATVs should be launched in 2013.

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