

Space station dodges junk from old satellite (Update)

October 27 2014, by Marcia Dunn

The International Space Station sidestepped a piece of treacherous junk Monday just hours before the planned launch of a supply ship from Virginia.

NASA said debris from an old, wrecked Russian satellite would have come dangerously close to the orbiting lab if not for the move.

The space station was maneuvered well out of harm's way to keep the outpost and its six inhabitants safe.

Mission Control was informed of the space junk over the weekend. It is wreckage from a Kosmos satellite that was launched in 1993 and collided with an Iridium spacecraft in 2009.

Mission Control said the space station's relocation would not affect Monday evening's scheduled launch of a commercial supply ship.

Orbital Sciences Corp.'s unmanned Cygnus capsule holds 5,000 pounds (2,267 kilograms) of cargo for NASA, including 32 mini research satellites, a meteor tracker, and a tank of high-pressure nitrogen to replenish a vestibule used by spacewalking astronauts. Liftoff was scheduled for 6:45 p.m. from Wallops Island, Virginia.

The launch, coming a half-hour after sunset, should be visible along much of the Eastern Seaboard, from South Carolina to Connecticut and Massachusetts. As an added bonus, the space station was to pass

overhead five minutes later, resembling a fast-moving star.

Traffic is heavy these days 260 miles (418 kilometers) up.

Just this past Saturday, a Dragon cargo ship supplied by the California-based SpaceX company—its fifth—departed the space station after a monthlong visit and splashed into the Pacific with a load of precious science samples.

On Wednesday, a Russian cargo ship is set to rocket into orbit from Kazakhstan and arrive at the space station the same day.

The Cygnus—named after the swan constellation—would arrive Sunday and remain at the station until early December. It is not designed to return safely like the Dragon, but rather will be filled with trash and burn up in the atmosphere.

"Given all the traffic that's coming and going ... we might want to send up some of those red and green wands they use on the deck of an aircraft carrier," said Orbital Sciences' executive vice president Frank Culbertson, a former astronaut who lived on the space station more than a decade ago.

This is the fourth space station delivery for the Virginia-based Orbital Sciences. Each one honors a deceased person linked to the company or commercial spaceflight; this one pays tribute to Mercury astronaut Deke Slayton, who led a rocket company until his death in 1993.

Orbital Sciences tucked in some treats for a post-Halloween celebration by the two Americans, three Russians and one German on board. Culbertson did not want to divulge the type of goodies and spoil the surprise. "They might be watching" he said, smiling, at Sunday's prelaunch news conference.

NASA is paying Orbital Sciences and SpaceX to make regular space station deliveries.

More information: NASA:

www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/main/index.html

Orbital Sciences: www.orbital.com/

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Space station dodges junk from old satellite (Update) (2014, October 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-10-space-station-dodging-junk-satellite.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.