

Third spacewalk in three weeks at space station

October 22 2014, by Marcia Dunn



This frame grab image from a live NASA feed shows Russian astronauts Maxim Suraev and Alexander Samokutyaev during a spacewalk outside the International Space Station on Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2014. The astronauts are performing maintenance, removing two antennas that are no longer needed, inspecting the outside of the Russian segment, collecting samples from windows and elsewhere to check for engine exhaust and other materials. (AP Photo/NASA)

Spacewalking astronauts doubled as trash men Wednesday, heaving an old science experiment and two antennas overboard at the International

Space Station.

It was the third spacewalk in as many weeks outside the orbiting lab. This time, it was on the Russian side of the house and went so well that it wrapped up more than two hours early.

Russian spaceman Alexander Samokutyaev used his left gloved hand to shove the antennas away one by one, five minutes apart. He paused dramatically before letting the second one loose, for a better camera view.

The dish antennas—up to 2.5 feet (0.7 meters) long—resembled white umbrellas. The first one spun as it drifted away.

"It looks like it's going to rain: Antennas are flying low," someone said in Russian.

A couple of hours earlier, spacewalker Maxim Suraev released a seismic experiment, essentially a panel stretching 6 feet (1.8 meters) long and 4.5 feet (1.4 meters) across.

"Three cheers," someone noted in Russian. "This is an event of some note."

The panel, shining yellow in the station spotlights, slowly spun in circles as it tumbled away into the blackness 260 miles (418 kilometers) up. The experiment was launched in 2011 to monitor earthquakes and had completed its job. The antennas were launched in 2009 aboard a Russian mini-research module; they were determined to be in the way of future spacewalkers.

NASA's Mission Control in Houston said analyses were conducted to ensure the objects would not come back and smash into the space

station.

All three discarded items should orbit for several months, possibly even a year, before burning up in the atmosphere.

The Russian Space Agency, unlike NASA, routinely gets rid of old equipment by setting it loose in orbit.

The spacewalkers joked and chuckled as they worked to remove the antennas from the station's hull. As Samokutyaev repeatedly opened and closed his cable cutters, Suraev observed, "Don't cut my finger off."

"No, I think I will not do that. It's just too far away to walk to the station," Samokutyaev replied.

A hard rubber washer almost got away from Samokutyaev, but he managed to catch it. He was urged to keep it as a good luck charm.

Their garbage work completed early, the spacewalkers turned their attention to inspection. They collected samples from windows and elsewhere outside the Russian segment to check for engine exhaust and other materials.

The pair wrapped everything up in 3½ hours, versus the originally allotted six hours.

"It seems like we did everything so quickly," one of the spacewalkers said. "I would like to stay out some more."

During each of the previous two weeks, American spacewalkers took care of some outside maintenance.

The crew now gets a break: The next spacewalk isn't until January.

Altogether, six people live on the orbiting lab: three Russians, two Americans and one German.

More information:

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

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