

SpaceX capsule was destroyed in 'anomaly': lawmaker

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A Crew Dragon capsule at the Kennedy Space Center

A space capsule suspected to have exploded last month in an incident characterized by manufacturer SpaceX as an "anomaly" was in fact completely destroyed, a US Senator confirmed Wednesday.

"The most recent SpaceX anomaly caused the complete loss of the (crew) capsule," Senator Richard Shelby, chairman of a Senate committee that manages NASA's budget, said during a hearing.

NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine told Shelby the agency, which has contracted its mission to resume carrying US astronauts to the International Space Station to Elon Musk's SpaceX and Boeing, would be carrying out a joint investigation with SpaceX.

NASA and SpaceX have remained tight-lipped about what caused the serious incident during engine tests on April 25.

A leaked video posted on Twitter, later indirectly authenticated by NASA, showed an explosion.

NASA is counting on SpaceX's Crew Dragon capsule to ferry astronauts to and from the ISS, a task handled since 2011 by Russia, with first manned flight planned before the end of the year.

The capsule that exploded was to be launched by a rocket in the coming months during a full-scale test of its in-flight abort system that would allow it to return to Earth in case of an emergency.

SpaceX and NASA must now urgently work to discover the cause of the explosion as well as replace the capsule—calling into question NASA's stated goal of launching American astronauts into space from US soil by the end of 2019.

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