

SpaceX, NASA looking into sluggish chutes on last 2 flights

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SpaceX and NASA are investigating a parachute issue that occurred on the last two capsule flights.

One of the four main parachutes was slow to inflate during the return of four astronauts to Earth last November. The same thing happened last week as a Dragon cargo capsule was bringing back science experiments from the International Space Station. In both cases, the sluggish [parachute](#) eventually opened and inflated—although more than a minute late—and the capsules splashed down safely off the Florida coast.

Officials for SpaceX and NASA said Friday they want to better understand what's happening, especially before launching another crew in a month or two. They're looking at photographs and inspecting the parachutes for clues, taking "extra caution with this very critical system," said Steve Stich, manager of NASA's commercial crew program.

"We're not taking anything for granted," SpaceX's William Gerstenmaier, a former NASA official, told reporters.

SpaceX's first private flight to the [space station](#), with three ticket-buying businessmen and their retired astronaut escort, is set to blast off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center on March 30. NASA's next astronaut ferry flight would follow on April 15.

Officials said the lagging parachutes also occurred during development and in previous cargo missions, and could just be a natural feature of the multiple-chute design. Despite the slow opening of one of the four large chutes, the capsules still descended at a safe rate, they noted. The descent data was near normal, Gerstenmaier said.

Only three of four parachutes are needed for a safe splashdown off the Florida coast, according to officials.

Similar parachutes are used on Boeing's Starliner crew capsule and NASA's Orion moon [capsule](#), neither of which has launched [astronauts](#) yet. These, too, sometimes lag when inflating, Stich said, and so the

results of the SpaceX investigation will be shared.

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