

Russia 'expected' to launch rescue ship to ISS on Feb 24: official

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A NASA video grab shows liquid spraying from the Soyuz MS-22 spacecraft in December.

Russia's space agency said Saturday it was planning to send a rescue ship on February 24 to bring home three astronauts whose return vehicle was damaged by a tiny meteoroid.

"The [launch](#) is expected on February 24," a spokesman for the Roscosmos space agency told AFP.

Last Monday, the space agency said it had delayed the launch of the Soyuz MS-23 spacecraft, saying a supply ship docked at the International Space Station (ISS) had leaked [coolant](#).

The Soyuz MS-22 flew Russian cosmonauts Dmitry Petelin and Sergei Prokopyev and NASA astronaut Frank Rubio to the ISS in September.

They were scheduled to return home in the same spacecraft, but it began leaking coolant in mid-December after being hit by what US and Russian space officials believe was a tiny space rock.

In January, Russia said that it would send an empty spacecraft to the ISS in February to bring home the three [astronauts](#).

Last Monday, the launch was postponed after another vessel—a Russian supply ship docked at the ISS, the Progress MS-21—had also leaked coolant, sparking concern.

Earlier on Saturday, the Russian space agency said that chief designers had now recommended that the launch of the rescue ship be set for 03:34 am (00:34 GMT) on February 24.

The Soyuz MS-23 had been carefully examined, and no damage had been found, the space agency said.

Now a state commission has to sign off on the new date.

The Roscosmos official told AFP that the state commission was widely expected to approve the new launch date.

The Progress supply ship will be de-orbited on February 19, the [space agency](#) said in a separate statement.

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