

Spacewalking astronauts move crane, skip shields

February 16 2012, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer

Two [spacewalking astronauts](#) moved a construction crane outside the International Space Station on Thursday, a cumbersome job that took so long they scrapped hanging shields to protect against space junk.

Russians Oleg Kononenko and Anton Shkaplerov spent more than three hours struggling to move the 46-foot crane, using another boom. By the time it was locked into its new position, the two were beat.

"It's huge. We're all hot and bothered," one of the spacewalkers told Mission Control outside Moscow.

The crane wobbled and flapped back and forth as the astronauts relocated it on the Russian side of the orbiting complex. [Flight controllers](#) urged them to be careful and avoid banging into the space station.

"It's a little closer ... than I'd like it to be," a voice called out. The astronauts said the crane was awkward to handle.

Spotty communications complicated the work. At times, the radio links were so poor that the controllers repeatedly informed the spacewalkers, "unintelligible, unintelligible." And at the beginning of the spacewalk, a balky ring at the hatch held the two men up.

In the end, Kononenko and Shkaplerov did not have enough time to install any [micrometeorite](#) shielding on one of the station's oldest

compartments.

[Space debris](#) is a major threat to the space station. NASA's compartments were launched with armor already in place, while Russia's were not. Station construction wrapped up last year, with the close of the [shuttle program](#).

The shielding will be saved for a future spacewalk; the next one isn't scheduled until August. The pace of spacewalks has slowed considerably since construction ended at the 250-mile-high lab.

Besides the crane work, the spacewalkers hung out a science experiment and, before going back inside, took a sample swab from an area covered by thermal blankets to check for any growth.

There wasn't even time for picture-taking. As the six-hour spacewalk came to a close, one of the astronauts commented: "I cannot believe we have not taken a single shot of anything."

The crane relocation was the main objective, though, and Mission Control congratulated the two for accomplishing the "enormous task."

The space station's four other residents - Americans Daniel Burbank and Donald Pettit, Russian Anatoly Ivanishin and Dutchman Andre Kuipers - monitored Thursday's [spacewalk](#) from inside.

More information: NASA:

<http://www.nasa.gov/mission-pages/station/main/index.html>

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