

Computer mishap delays space station supply ship (Update)

22 September 2013, by Marcia Dunn

A brand new commercial cargo ship making its orbital debut experienced navigation system trouble Sunday, and its arrival at the International Space Station was delayed at least two days.

The rendezvous was aborted less than six hours before the scheduled arrival of Orbital Sciences Corp.'s Cygnus capsule, packed with 1,300 pounds (590 kilograms) of food and clothes for the space station crew.

The Virginia-based company said it already has developed a software repair. The new software will be tested on the ground before it is transmitted to the Cygnus and tested again. If all goes well, the capsule will make another docking attempt Tuesday morning.

Orbital Sciences said the two orbiting vessels established direct contact early Sunday, four days after the Cygnus' launch from Virginia. But the Cygnus rejected some of the data, which interrupted the entire rendezvous. Until then, everything had been going well.

The problem was traced to a difference in data format in the navigation systems of the two spacecraft, the company said. Otherwise, the Cygnus remains healthy.

Because this is a test flight of the Cygnus, nothing valuable or urgent is on board. If necessary, it could keep orbiting the world for weeks, even months, before pulling up at the orbiting lab.

Orbital Sciences is the second private company to launch supplies to the space station. In 2012, the California-based SpaceX began accomplishing that job for NASA. The space agency is paying the two companies to deliver goods to the space station, in the absence of the now-retired space shuttles.

Three astronauts—an American, Italian and Russian—currently are aboard the orbiting outpost.

On Wednesday, three more crew members will be launched from Kazakhstan. Orbital Sciences will have to work around that manned flight, delaying the Cygnus further if a Tuesday hookup is not feasible.

More information: Orbital Sciences Corp.: www.orbital.com/Antares-Cygnus/
NASA: www.nasa.gov/content/cygnus-re...us-delayed-48-hours/

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