

Russian astronauts take spacewalk to upgrade station antenna (Update)

2 February 2018, by Marcia Dunn



The International Space Station with the Space Shuttle Atlantis docked on the right and a Russian Soyuz on the far left in 2011.

Spacewalking Russian astronauts removed an old electronics box as part of an antenna upgrade at the International Space Station on Friday, then tossed it overboard as a piece of junk.

Commander Alexander Misurkin used both gloved hands to shove the bundle away from the Russian side of the orbiting complex. The unit—bearing white insulation, with straps dangling—tumbled harmlessly away, high above the North Atlantic.

"There it goes," NASA's Mission Control reported from Houston. The 60-pound box was hurled in a direction that will not intersect with the space station, according to NASA officials.

With the obsolete unit finally out of the way four hours into the spacewalk, Misurkin and Anton Shkaplerov set about installing the new one.

Original to the 250-mile-high outpost, the antenna and associated equipment has been up there since 2000. The new electronics box will improve the

communications with Russia's Mission Control outside Moscow.

It was the second spacewalk in as many weeks. On Jan. 23, two U.S. astronauts went out to give a new hand to the station's big robotic arm. NASA had planned another spacewalk this week, but bumped it to mid-February because engineers needed extra time to get the mechanical hand working.

While the Russians routinely toss old equipment and used towels overboard during spacewalks, NASA prefers to secure no-longer-needed items or, if possible, bring them inside. All but SpaceX's cargo ships are filled with trash, once emptied of their contents, and set loose to burn up in the atmosphere. The discarded electronics box will re-enter and burn up, too; Mission Control said it did not know when that will occur.

Misurkin will return to Earth at the end of this month with two NASA crewmates.

The space station is home to two Russians, three Americans and one Japanese.

More information: NASA:

www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/main/index.html

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