

Shuttle crew excited and ready to go

22 February 2007

The crew of U.S. space shuttle Atlantis met with reporters Thursday during the first day of their "dry countdown" leading to their March 15 launch.

STS-117 Commander Rick Sturckow opened the briefing by saying: "It's good to be down in Florida for the dry countdown and our crew is very excited. This means we're getting close to launch and we're going to be ready to go."

The astronauts answered questions about their mission roles and the challenges they'll face in space while continuing construction at the International Space Station.

When asked about the team's readiness for this complex mission, Sturckow answered: "We've already achieved a very good proficiency. We've had excellent training for about the last nine months."

Thursday's training activities included emergency exiting exercises from the 195-foot level of the launch pad, familiarization with the security of the payload, and several safety briefings. The day's schedule also included additional shuttle training aircraft flights for Sturckow and shuttle pilot Lee Archambault.

The full launch dress rehearsal, known as the terminal countdown demonstration test, is typically carried out a few weeks before a shuttle's launch.

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