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Columbus: Atlantis launch delayed until Sunday

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The new launch date for mission STS-122 is currently targeted for 7 February 2008.



Space Shuttle Atlantis will be launched on Sunday 9 December at 21.21 Central European Time (15.21 local time) from Kennedy Space Center in Florida, according to Mission Management Team chairman LeRoy Cain in a Saturday afternoon press conference.

Shuttle programme managers made the decision after a meeting on Friday to review data on a problem with a fuel cutoff sensor system inside the shuttle and its external fuel tank.

Because of the length of the meeting, the managers agreed that targeting Sunday would allow the launch and management teams appropriate time to rest and prepare. The Mission Management Team met on Saturday and confirmed that the Atlantis launch would occur on Sunday.

Atlantis' scheduled launch Thursday was delayed after two ECO sensors gave false readings. A third sensor failed after the tank was drained of fuel. The fuel cutoff sensor system is one of several that protects the shuttle's main engines by triggering their shut down if fuel runs unexpectedly low.

Atlantis' main cargo will be the European Columbus space laboratory which will be installed during the mission. This is Europe's biggest single contribution to the International Space Station. The 4.5-metre diameter cylindrical module is equipped with flexible research facilities that offer extensive science capabilities. The Columbus Control Centre will be based at DLR's Oberpfaffenhofen facility, near Munich.

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