

Space Agency Determines Soyuz Crash Cause

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The crash of an unmanned supply ship bound for the International Space Station last month was caused by a manufacturing flaw, the Federal Space Agency said.

The flaw led to the failure of a gas generator of the Soyuz rocket's third-stage engine minutes after launch, the agency said late last week. A government panel investigating the Aug. 24 crash concluded that the manufacturing flaw was "accidental."

The space agency added that all similar rocket engines would be checked and further Soyuz launches would proceed depending on the engines' condition. It gave no specific schedule.

With NASA's space shuttles retired as of July, Soyuz is the only means of getting astronauts to and from the space station. The Soyuz rocket that failed last month is similar to the ones used to launch astronauts to the station.

NASA said the space station — continuously manned for nearly 11 years — would need to be abandoned temporarily if a new crew cannot be launched before the last of the station's six

residents fly back to Earth in mid-November.

NASA said Thursday that it had been following the Russian investigation.

"They are sharing their data with us, and we are assessing the data ourselves," NASA spokesman Michael Curie said.

"This is an ongoing process and finding the cause is the beginning step," he said. "We look forward to working with our Russian colleagues to fully understand what happened and take the corrective actions necessary to ensure the safe continuation of flights to the International Space Station."

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