

Cosmonauts Venture Outside Space Station for Spacewalk

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A pair of Russian cosmonauts floated outside the International Space Station on Thursday to hook up a new communications antenna and tackle other chores.

Flight engineers Alexander Skvortsov and Oleg Artemyev left the station's Pirs airlock shortly after 6 p.m. for what was expected to be 6 1/2 hours of work outside Russia's Zvezda service module. The spacewalk was broadcast live on NASA's television channel.

It was the first spacewalk for both men who, along with station commander Steve Swanson, have been aboard the orbital outpost for about three months. They were joined on May 28 by three more crew members, including NASA astronaut Reid Wiseman, who has been documenting his time in space on Twitter.

"Pretty neat up here right now — two Russian crewmates are spacewalking, but business as usual for me and @astro_alex," Wiseman wrote, referring to colleague and fellow space-tweeter, Alexander Gerst, with the European Space Agency.

"Just changed a lightbulb. FYI — only one astronaut and a small ground team required," Wiseman quipped earlier on Twitter.

Similar maintenance chores await spacewalkers Skvortsov and Artemyev, albeit with a much better view. The station, a \$100 billion research laboratory owned by 15 nations, flies about 420 kilometers above Earth.

The cosmonauts' to-do list includes installing a new communications antenna on the rear of the Zvezda module, inspecting latches, relocating a science experiment and collecting samples of residue on one of Zvezda's windows.

They also are scheduled to move science equipment onto a new boom and discard the old mounting into orbit. The trash eventually will be pulled back into Earth's atmosphere and burned up.

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