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Space Station Crew Sheltering in Russian Segment after Possible Ammonia Leak

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The International Space Station

The U.S. segment of the International Space Station (ISS) has been evacuated and sealed off from the rest of the station after indications of a hazardous chemical leak were discovered, a senior NASA official said Wednesday.

The alarm was later found to have been false, though the crew spent the night in the Russian segment.

Sean Fuller, NASA's top representative in Russia, told The Moscow Times by phone that the U.S. and European crew living in the U.S. side of ISS had taken refuge in the Russian segment after a possible ammonia leak was detected.

According to a statement by Russia's space agency, Roscosmos, signs of air contamination

were detected at 11:44 a.m. Moscow time.

On Wednesday evening NASA reported on its official Twitter account that the alarm was set off by a computer glitch rather than a genuine leak of the highly toxic chemical, which is used to cool the $150 billion orbital outpost.

The six-man international crew is now living in the Russian side of ISS, which was isolated from the other modules in case the alarm was genuine.

“The crew's safety has been achieved through the coordinated and expedient actions of the cosmonauts and astronauts, as well as the mission control teams in Moscow and in Houston,” the head of the Russian mission control center in Moscow, Maxim Matyushin, was quoted as saying in the Roscosmos statement on Wednesday.

A spokesperson for Russia's mission control center said later that there is enough food, water and oxygen to support the entire crew in the Russian half of the station for an extended period of time, if necessary, Interfax reported.

“The station was originally designed in such a way that each segment of the station duplicated basic life-support functions for the entire ISS crew,” the spokesperson told Interfax.

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