NASA: February launch still on despite bad hoses

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) -- NASA is still shooting for a shuttle launch next month, despite bad hoses for a new room at the space station.

Endeavour is supposed to blast off Feb. 7 with the Tranquility module. It's a chamber that will provide additional living quarters at the International Space Station.

Recent tests found a problem with the ammonia coolant lines for the module. The metal braiding on two of the four hoses began separating.

NASA manager Pete Hasbrook said Monday that the California contractor is beefing up the 14-foot high-pressure hoses. The hoses are longer than usual because of a change in location for Tranquility at the orbiting outpost.

At the same time, engineers are building new hoses out of old equipment. Hasbrook said either option hopefully will keep the mission on track. If not, NASA might send up Tranquility in February and fly the improved hoses in March. But in that case, much of the equipment, like the treadmill and life support systems, could not be used until the hoses arrived. That's because the machines need to be cooled.

Tranquility - named after the Apollo 11 landing site on the moon - is one of the last major pieces of the space station. It will sport a cupola with seven windows for prime Earth viewing.

NASA decided to change Tranquility's location at the space station, late in the game, to provide more flexibility in docking berths, Hasbrook said.

Space station construction is due to wrap up this year with the retirement of the shuttle fleet. Five more shuttle missions are planned.

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