

Future of International Space Station Uncertain

By Nancy Honovich

With space flights temporarily suspended as a result of Saturday's *Columbia* disaster, the fate of the International Space Station (ISS) has come into question.

The ISS is an international research station that orbits Earth. It can operate without a crew, but it requires occasional work.

The ISS crew currently consists of astronauts Ken Bowersox and Don Pettit, and **cosmonaut**, or Russian astronaut, Nikolai Budarin. They are scheduled to return in March, but with future shuttle flights now on hold, their stay will be longer. The crew could return to Earth aboard a Russian escape vehicle attached to the space station.

Space Shuttles on Hold

NASA doesn't yet know when they will send another shuttle into space. Following the space shuttle *Challenger* explosion in 1986, the space agency grounded all flights for 32 months.

This year many plans were scheduled for ISS, including a trip by Barbara Morgan, NASA's teacher in space. Morgan was Christa McAuliffe's alternate for the *Challenger* flight. McAuliffe was killed with six other

astronauts seconds after the *Challenger* lifted off in 1986. Morgan has been training in Houston for several years, eagerly awaiting her flight assignment, which came late last year. She was to have traveled to the ISS in November.

The space station was also to be expanded this year. Three new electricity generators were to be installed, increasing the power of the station. In addition, four new sections were to be added to the ISS structure by December. This would extend the length of the station from 134 feet to 310 feet.

Three new research facilities were to be delivered to the ISS laboratory. About 30 experiments were scheduled in the fields of biology, physics, chemistry, ecology, medicine, as well as the long-term effects of space flight on humans.



“The space station was intended to help us learn to live long-term in space,” one former top NASA administrator said Saturday. “If we’re going to go to Mars and to the outer planets, we’ve got to learn how to live for long periods of time in space.”

An unmanned Russian cargo ship was launched on Sunday morning to ferry supplies to the ISS. It is due to dock with the station on Tuesday, February 4. Supplies from the ship will feed the three current residents of the ISS until June.