

THE CHALLENGER ACCIDENT

10 years later

NASA learned from tragedy

By Chad Lorenz
Senior Reporter

Although Jan. 28, 1986, was a day of tragedy, it marked a new era in NASA operations.

From the Challenger space shuttle disaster, NASA learned a safer and more secure approach to its manned space missions, NASA spokesman James Hartfield said.

"Without a doubt, the changes made at NASA were totally needed," Hartfield said.

After the Challenger accident, NASA grounded the shuttle program for 31 months before launching Discovery, he said.

During that time, the Rogers Commission, headed by William P. Rogers, investigated the accident and conducted a complete review of the shuttles' mechanical design and NASA procedures, Hartfield said.

The Challenger explosion was caused by hot gas leaking from a segment of a solid rocket booster. The gas ignited the orange fuel tank containing liquid hydrogen and

"There's not a person at NASA or in the world who wanted to learn such a lesson through such a tragedy."

JAMES HARTFIELD
NASA spokesman

oxygen, a volatile compound.

The gas leaked around a rubber o-ring seal that had become brittle from the cold morning air.

The commission recommended a complete redesign of the booster rockets, Hartfield said.

Engineers added a second rubber o-ring to each segment of the rockets, designed a lip around the segments to prevent leakage and put heaters in the joints to keep them from freezing.

NASA also made a policy pro-

hibiting launches when the temperature dropped below 40 degrees, Hartfield said.

Delaying launches has become more common since the Challenger accident, Hartfield said.

NASA's top administrators must unanimously authorize every shuttle launch, he said. Until the Challenger catastrophe, NASA feared the public would interpret delays as failures, he said.

"There's some thought that NASA felt a great deal of pressure to launch on time," Hartfield said.

The accident taught the public to be patient with the space program and realize delays were necessary precautions, he said.

With the shuttle's redesign came a new consciousness for the risk involved in manned missions, he said.

Before the Challenger tragedy, NASA flew some shuttle missions under a commercial flag, Hartfield said.

See NASA on 6

Impact on generation difficult to measure

From Staff Reports

Although the Challenger disaster may have shocked school children in 1986, those children probably grew up without much permanent negative impact, two UNL psychology professors said Thursday.

Mario Scalora, a research assistant professor of psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center on Children, Families and the Law, said the impact of the disaster needed to be measured on an individual basis.

"It's easy to say, 'Where were you when this happened?'" Scalora said. "But it's hard to say what the effects on the entire Generation X are."

"It depends on how big an impact it had on each individual person."

Ross Thompson, a UNL developmental psychology professor, said students would be affected only if they had strong ties to the disaster.

If the mission to take teacher Christa McAuliffe into space was talked about a lot at home or school, then the impact would be greater, Thompson said.

"For some college students, it may have had a personal effect if they were following the space program, or if their parents had an interest in it," he said.

But for others, if the space shuttle missions weren't a big part of their lives, impact would be less, he said.

"It always depends on the person and the situation," Thompson said. "Some kids were barely touched at all, and it bears no lingering effects on them as college students or to their generation."



Lecture Notes

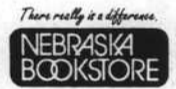
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