

## **Opening statement of NASA Administrator Michael Griffin August 29, 2007**

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us.

For several weeks now, senior managers at NASA, directed by myself and Deputy Administrator Shana Dale, have been evaluating a report from a team of outside experts who were asked to review our agency's medical and behavioral health care policies and practices for astronauts.

In response to the report, we are moving forward on a number of actions and modifications of NASA policies, procedures and organizational structures that we believe will improve our astronaut health care systems. The committee -- chaired by Col. Richard Bachmann, commander of the U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine -- put great time, thought and effort into their report. We are grateful for their service and their interest in helping us make NASA a better agency.

I would like to update you today on our progress in several areas.

The first area, which certainly has received the most attention, is the report's allegations of improper use of alcohol by astronauts preparing to fly. As you know, we asked NASA Chief of Safety and Mission Assurance Bryan O'Connor to conduct an extensive examination into claims of astronauts being impaired by alcohol in the immediate pre-flight period, and claims of management not being responsive to concerns by flight surgeons and others about astronauts' fitness to fly.

Bryan immediately set to work on this important task -- poring through records of shuttle, Soyuz and other flights involving U.S. astronauts for the past 20 years. He interviewed astronauts, flight controllers, medical personnel and scores of other people who take part in training and evaluating our crews and getting them ready to fly. And his review found no evidence to support the claims that astronauts were ever impaired by alcohol at launch time.

In fact, NASA's flight surgeons have put their names on a communication saying they had no evidence of alcohol impairment by astronauts on flight day, nor any instances of their concerns to management being disregarded. That communication is part of Bryan's report.

I have said many times over the past weeks that we take these allegations very seriously -- just as we would any issue that could impact the safety of our missions. But at the same time, I also have said that the stories cited in the report seem improbable to those of us familiar with the astronauts' rigorous and very public activities during the hours leading up to a space flight.

Bryan is with me here today to discuss his review and to help answer your questions. I want to thank him for taking on this important task and completing it in such an expeditious manner.

But before Bryan tells you about his review and its results, I want to briefly mention some of the other things we are doing to address the other concerns and recommendations of the report by Col. Bachmann and his committee – which we believe are very valuable to helping us improve our astronaut health-care procedures.

- In response to the report, NASA's medical managers are working to determine how many of the changes and initiatives advocated by the committee would fit into NASA health-care procedures in a way that improves their effectiveness.
- We have accepted the report's recommendations concerning the analysis and use of behavioral health data to improve selection criteria and will convene expert working groups to advise us on any changes to our psychological testing.
- We are evaluating the overall delivery of behavioral health services to astronauts and are planning additional training for flight surgeons in behavioral health assessments.
- We will add behavioral health evaluations to annual flight physicals for all astronauts. And we will work to ensure better communication throughout the astronaut health-care system.
- We are working to ensure that astronauts understand fully the nature and purpose of all health related testing and data collection.
- We are working to make sure everyone in the astronaut health-care system understands the multiple pathways which are available to raise any safety and health concerns.
- We are re-evaluating our electronic medical records system to assure maximum utility and security of private medical information.
- We are examining policies for assuring the quality of care we arrange for our astronauts by outside medical providers to determine if changes are needed.
- The astronaut office is developing a formal code of conduct that will be a document outlining the expectations for this highly skilled group of professionals. America's astronauts always have operated with the knowledge that much is expected of them in many areas, including personal conduct. But until now, these expectations and standards had not been codified into an official document.

- To address organizational culture issues discussed in the report, we are conducting a number of internal assessments, including anonymous surveys to be completed by astronauts and flight surgeons, to provide feedback and gather information that we will use to improve communications and ensure leadership is responsive to concerns and complaints, particularly those involving flight safety.

I once again would like to thank Col. Bachmann and the members of his committee for their efforts. I would like to reassure the members of the committee that while much media attention has been given to the allegations relating to alcohol use, I and other NASA managers are giving the entire report the full and complete attention it deserves. We appreciate their interest in helping us make NASA a better agency.