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## Crew Accidentally Pulls Plug on Mir

- By [Suzanne Thompson](#)
- Jul. 18 1997 00:00

KOROLYOV, Central Russia -- The exhausted crew of the Mir space station battled to keep the vessel in proper position Thursday after a crew member inadvertently disconnected a cable and cut power to critical systems.

The latest in a string of Mir mishaps left key solar panels turned away from the sun, causing a critical loss of power. Space officials said the crew was in no immediate danger, however, and they hoped to have Mir properly positioned again by Friday morning.

"Today, we had a very bad situation, serious trouble," mission control chief Vladimir Solovyov said at a news conference Thursday morning. "We have lost all power."

With power to the main communications equipment shut down, the crew had to talk to mission control through a system on the Soyuz emergency escape craft permanently moored to Mir.

A vital computer link was established by Thursday evening, enabling ground crews to analyze data to help the three-man, Russian-American crew make repairs. Officials said there were no plans to abort the mission and return the crew to Earth.

"I expect the ship will be re-oriented by tomorrow morning, by about 9 a.m.," said Solovyov. He said it probably would be early Saturday before the gyro system that keeps Mir properly positioned would be back in service.

Meanwhile, the crew must use thrusters to adjust position, which consumes valuable fuel.

It was at least the second time a power outage has disabled Mir's gyro system since the station was hit and punctured by a cargo vessel June 25 during a practice docking. The collision forced the crew to seal off the Spektr scientific module, cutting or unplugging key power cables in the process.

The latest mishap means planned repairs involving a space walk, already delayed once, will have to be pushed back again and might not be possible until the next crew is due to arrive in early August.

Repair plans were frustrated earlier in the week when Mir commander Vasily Tsibliyev developed disconnected the cable linking the control panel providing on-board information with the computer systems," Solovyov said.

That left the station darkened and rotating freely in space. After establishing contact with mission control, Solovyov said, the crew members lost another night's sleep as they battled to fix the problem.

Flight controllers scrambled Thursday to re-orient Mir toward the sun to recharge its solar panels. Viktor Blagov, deputy flight engineer, said the crew was periodically firing the engines of the Soyuz escape module to correct Mir's position.

"What they're doing is using the thrusters on the Soyuz to make changes to try to point the arrays toward the sun to start charging the batteries," said Leroy Chiao, a NASA Shuttle astronaut who came to Moscow to assist in advising Foale on the space walk.

"This incident has caused a loss of power, and so if you can point the arrays toward the sun, you get more power. Then you can power up more equipment, including their communications system, which will allow telemetry to come down and give the ground controllers a better idea of what the state of the mission is," Chiao said.

The oxygen generation system was among systems that had to be shut down to conserve power, but Blagov said there was a five-day emergency backup supply. Mir was resupplied by a cargo ship that arrived earlier this month.

Blagov also said use of the Soyuz module's thrusters to re-orient Mir would not use excessive fuel, leaving plenty for a safe return to Earth if necessary.

Tensions ran high at mission control as officials shouted instructions to the crew during an afternoon voice link-up. "Shut it off! Shut it off!" a mission controller ordered Tsibliyev in an attempt to save limited power on board Mir.

According to Igor Goncharov, Solovyov's deputy for medical affairs, Tsibliyev worked all night on the latest problem, despite advice by doctors that he should get enough sleep to alleviate the stress and exhaustion that medical officials believe caused his heart arrhythmia.

Goncharov said he would not exclude the possibility that this most recent error was caused by the crew's exhaustion. Solovyov said the cable disconnection was clearly a mistake by the crew: "This was purely a human error."

NASA officials at Korolyov would not comment Thursday on the newest snag on Mir. But Chiao said he shared his Russian colleagues' optimism that the situation would be resolved satisfactorily.

"This mission has been kind of unusual in that they have had more incidents than they would have liked," he said. "But they are well trained to deal with emergencies just like we are in the shuttle. They practice procedures in their simulators, and Mike Foale has been through all that training.

"So while I'm sure this latest incident has been somewhat stressful, they're well trained to deal with it, and they're executing their operations in coordination with the ground."

With the crew struggling to restore basic power, Solovyov acknowledged that the space walk -- scheduled tentatively for July 24 before the latest mishap -- might have to be delayed indefinitely. That could leave the Spektr repair to be performed by the incoming Russian-French crew, slated for launch from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on Aug. 5.

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