

NBC's 3rd *Hour of Today*

02/03/26

9:00:24 a.m. [TEASE]

18 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Delayed]

AL ROKER: Plus, delayed overnight. NASA pushing back its historic Artemis II launch after discovering a leak during a test run.

CHARLIE CAMARDA: I don't think NASA should be flying the crew on this vehicle.

ROKER: — as a former astronaut sounds the alarm about his major safety concerns. We're live with all the latest developments.

(...)

9:09:35 a.m. [TEASE]

11 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Next; Mission Delayed]

CRAIG MELVIN: Still to come, major decision from NASA overnight about the historic Artemis II launch. Why it is now being delayed and why one former astronaut is raising some serious safety concerns.

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9:13:35 a.m.

4 minutes and 48 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Kennedy Space Center]

MELVIN: A live look right now at the Artemis II rocket on Launch Pad 39B. This is the scene at the Kennedy Space Center. And overnight, we learned that rocket you see right there, it's going to be right there for a while.

DYLAN DREYER: It sure is. NASA made the decision to delay its mission around the moon, after a problem during a dress rehearsal.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: NASA Delays Artemis Moon Launch]

ROKER: Well, now, there's a former astronaut who's raising concerns about the safety of the crew. Well, we've got NBC's Tom Costello who covers space for us. And so, he's joining us now. So, Tom, what's the latest on this?

TOM COSTELLO: Well, listen, this really wasn't a huge surprise, right? NASA has dealt with leaks before and then it has had a lot of extra time built into the schedule, just in case. This was an all-day fueling test yesterday. 700,000 gallons of liquid hydrogen and oxygen, but they ended up spending hours dealing with a liquid hydrogen leak, so the launch, set for Sunday, is now postponed for at least a month. At the Kennedy Space Station overnight, a temporary blow to NASA's planned mission to send four astronauts on a trip around the moon.

HOWARD HU: We had a little glitch earlier with a hydrogen leak.

COSTELLO: That technical issue forcing NASA now to delay its February launch, pushing the Artemis 2 launch until March at the earliest. As a result, the Artemis astronauts will now be released from quarantine. TOM COSTELLO: But that may not be the only problem. A former astronaut and thermal protection engineer is warning, the heat shield on the crew's Orion spaceship could fail as it hits 5,000 degrees on re-entry. [TO CAMARDA] Do you fear this crew could lose their lives?

CAMARDA: Absolutely.

COSTELLO: Charlie Camarda flew on the first mission following the space shuttle Columbia disaster that killed all seven astronauts after the heat shield was damaged on liftoff. Now Camarda is pointing to the heat shield on the Orion capsule, which showed burn marks, cracks, and pieces missing after the uncrewed Artemis I flight in 2022. This time, four astronauts will be on board Artemis II.

CAMARDA: I don't think NASA should be flying a crew on this vehicle. It is a deviant heat shield. We know it's a deviant heat shield. We do not know how it's going to fail or how we can predict it's going to fail.

COSTELLO: But NASA says it is changing Orion's return angle to ensure the crew is protected.

JEFF RADIGAN: We've changed the entry profile so that we're flying a profile that the heat shield can handle.

COSTELLO: Commander Reed Wiseman on *60 Minutes*.

REED WISEMAN [on CBS's *60 Minutes*, 02/01/26]: We're going to come in hotter, a little bit faster than Artemis I and based on the issues that we have with the heat shield, that will keep us safe.

COSTELLO: Really important to note here that former astronaut Camarata is really in the minority on this issue, right? NASA makes the point that internal and external engineering teams have reviewed all of the data on the heat shield and that they agree with NASA's plan for reentry. But of course, reentry is one of the most dangerous points of space travel. When they come back, they're actually going to come in a little bit more of a nose up kind of position. So that, they think, is going to help them on reentry, guys.

MELVIN: So, Tom, you mentioned that the astronauts there at NASA, they've gathered engineers in and outside of the agency.

COSTELLO: Yeah.

MELVIN: Are they going to do a final review before launch?

COSTELLO: Yeah, absolutely. Just before the countdown actually begins, mission managers will conduct a final flight readiness review. That's a final chance for engineers and mission managers to give their go or no-go for this mission. And again, now that we're postponed for another month, they'll look at all the data again, look at all the engineering again, give people like Charlie Camarata the chance to speak up yet again. Guys, I've covered Charlie for 20 years. He is not a shrinking violet. He always speaks his mind rather aggressively.

ROKER: Yeah, and you got to spend time with the Artemis crew, I did too, as they entered the home stretch. And, with this delay, the safety concerns, Tom, to the best of your knowledge, does this change how they prepare?

COSTELLO: No. In fact, what they will do is go back and double down and do it again and again and again. They'll take advantage of this period to retrain again, go back into the simulator, again. Go through all the steps again and again and again. You know, as you saw firsthand, as I've seen it over the years, they think that there's nothing better than committing it all to rote memory so that God forbid something happens, they automatically know how to react to that.

ROKER: Muscle memory. Tom, thanks so much. By the way, congratulations. I hope folks watch your documentary that's inside this historic mission. It's on NBC News Now or on YouTube. It's called *Artemis II: NASA's Journey to the Moon*. It is terrific and you did a great job with that, you and your producers.

COSTELLO: Thank you, guys.

DREYER: Good job, Tom.

MELVIN: Thank you. Thank you so much, Tom.