Boeing to Discuss Space Station Testbed Options at AAS Conference

Boeing [NYSE: BA] will be among aerospace industry leaders, scientists and NASA officials gathering next week near the Johnson Space Center to pick up where the Space Exploration Architecture Study (ESAS) left off in explaining the future role of the International Space Station (ISS).

"Building Bridges to Exploration: The Role of the International Space Station" is the theme for the Nov. 15-16 National Conference and Annual Meeting of American Astronautical Society (AAS) in League City, Texas. NASA Administrator Michael Griffin will be the keynote speaker for the opening session.

John Elbon, Boeing vice president and ISS program manager, says with ISS celebrating its fifth anniversary of continuous human presence in November, it's important to look at the possibilities.

"ISS affords a unique opportunity to serve as an engineering test bed for hardware applicable for human missions to the moon, Mars and beyond, and the ability to be flexible is crucial," says Elbon. "The hardware on orbit has been performing well for the astronauts over the past five years, with equipment working better than predicted."

Conference panelists and speakers will address such ISS topics as an exploration test bed, a platform for advanced health management, the future of international cooperation and the Chinese human space flight program.

Boeing will lead a panel discussion at 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 15, focusing on challenges enabling exploration risk reduction. The discussion follows an invitation-only media press briefing about the impact of ESAS on ISS and programs associated with the space station.

NASA released the ESAS in September, outlining the agency's approach to implementing the Vision for Space Exploration.

Boeing is the prime contractor for the ISS and is working closely with its suppliers and NASA to enhance the station's capabilities. Work includes studying options for augmented reality training devices focusing on skill-based training instead of task based and robotic assembly in space of cargo depots. Other options being explored are autonomous flying robots to perform inspections, concepts to test low-thrust propulsion systems, and partnering with companies to design an ergonomic all-purpose spacesuit.

The Regenerative Environmental Control Life System (ELCS) is another pursuit with future testbed possibilities. The ISS has an oxygen generator that can take water and decompose it into hydrogen and oxygen, to provide oxygen for the crew. New U.S. regenerative ELCS equipment, including an oxygen generator, is designed as backup to the current Russian Elektron system and will be installed in Destiny, the U.S. laboratory.

Another new feature of the regenerative ELCS will be urine and water processors. They can reclaim water from sources such as humidity from the air conditioning system, waste water and urine, and purify it for use by the oxygen generation system.

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