



Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas

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NASA CONTRACTOR CONVICTED FOR FRAUD INVOLVING SPACE VEHICLE PARTS

(HOUSTON) – Richard J. Harmon, 60, has pleaded guilty to one count of fraud involving space vehicle parts, acting United States Attorney Tim Johnson announced today.

Harmon owned a machine shop called Cornerstone Machining Inc. located in Alvin, Texas. Harmon was hired by Spacehab Inc. in 2007 to build a part for the Space Shuttle Endeavour. The part was designed to secure cargo to the payload bay of the Endeavour during a flight to the International Space Station in March 2008. The part, called a passive flight releasable attachment mechanism interface plate, was damaged during the manufacturing process.

Harmon covered up the damage by causing it to be welded without informing Spacehab. Harmon delivered the part to Spacehab without disclosing the damage and falsely certified the materials and processes used in machining the part complied with the requirements of applicable drawings. The damage and weld reduced the structural strength of the part by approximately 40 percent. A NASA engineer discovered the unauthorized weld during an inspection prior to the planned flight and the damaged part was discarded. Had NASA not discovered the damage and used the damaged part as planned, it could have cracked open during flight, allowed cargo to come loose and possibly resulted in the loss of the spacecraft and personnel aboard.

Originally indicted for fraud involving space vehicle parts and making a false statement in November 2008, today Harmon admitted in open court that he knew NASA would not have accepted the part if he had revealed the damage and weld.

U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes, who accepted Harmon's guilty plea, convicted him of the federal felony offense and has sent sentencing for June 29, 2009. Harmon faces a maximum possible penalty of 10 years imprisonment and \$250,000 fine.

The investigation leading to the charges against Harmon was conducted by the NASA Office of Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John R. Lewis.

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