



Department of Justice

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

Tim Johnson • Acting United States Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE	ANGELA DODGE
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NASA CONTRACTOR INDICTED FOR FRAUD INVOLVING SPACE VEHICLE PARTS

(HOUSTON) - Richard J. Harmon, 60, has been indicted and charged with fraud involving space vehicle parts and with making a false statement in a matter within the jurisdiction of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Acting United States Attorney Tim Johnson announced today.

The two-count indictment was returned by a Houston federal grand jury on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2008.

The indictment alleges that Harmon, owner a small business in Alvin, Texas, called Cornerstone Machining, Inc. ("Cornerstone"), was hired by Spacehab, Inc. ("Spacehab"), 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. According to the indictment, the part, called a Passive Flight Releasable Attachment Mechanism Interface Plate, was damaged during the manufacturing process and Harmon covered up the damage by welding it without informing Spacehab. The indictment further alleges that Harmon delivered the part to Spacehab without disclosing the damage and falsely certified that the materials and processes used in machining the part complied with the requirements of applicable drawings.

The indictment alleges that the damage and weld reduced the structural strength of the part by approximately 40 percent, and that if NASA had 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.

The indictment alleges that a NASA engineer discovered the unauthorized weld during an inspection and the damaged part was discarded.

The indictment charges Harmon with one count of Fraud Involving Space Vehicle Parts in violation of Title 18 U.S.C. Section 38. This count carries a maximum possible penalty of 10 years imprisonment and \$250,000 fine. The indictment also charges Harmon with one count of False Statement in violation of Title 18 U.S.C. Section 1001(a). A conviction for this count carries a maximum sentence of 5 years and a \$250,000 fine.

The criminal charges are the result of an investigation conducted by NASA Office of Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John R. Lewis.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.

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