



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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FORMER NASA EMPLOYEE INDICTED

Orlando, FL - United States Attorney Paul I. Perez today announced the unsealing of a 166-count indictment of BILLY THOMAS THORNTON, a 54-year-old resident of Cocoa, FL, charging THORNTON with 83 counts of fraud involving space shuttle parts and 83 counts of making false statements. Each of the fraud counts carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and each count of making a false statement carries a maximum sentence of ten years' imprisonment. THORNTON was arrested at his home Monday evening and made his initial appearance in Orlando federal court Tuesday morning at 11:00 a.m. before U.S. Magistrate Judge James Glazebrook. THORNTON was released on his own recognizance and is scheduled to be arraigned on Friday at 10:00 a.m.

According to the indictment, THORNTON was a quality assurance specialist with NASA at the Kennedy Space Center. In late 2002 and 2003, THORNTON failed to conduct 83 critical inspections of maintenance work performed on the space shuttle Discovery. Each of the 83 instances of failure to inspect is charged as a fraud involving space vehicle parts and as a false material statement to the government.

The case was investigated by NASA Office of Inspector General and will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Bruce Hinshelwood.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.