NASA Facts

The Press Site at KSC

Next to NASA Kennedy Space Center's Vehicle Assembly Building stands the gateway to the agency's latest news: the KSC press site, located at Complex 39. The site comprises the NASA News Center (below), with a Web studio and multimedia libraries, a television production studio with a 100-seat auditorium for press conference briefings, and facilities for the local press and television networks.

Located nearby on the grounds is an enormous countdown clock that ticks away the seconds before a liftoff. To the left proudly waves the American flag, providing picturesque, patriotic images during launches.

Offices and Divisions

The News Center houses a dedicated group of people who work to engage and inform the public and KSC employees about NASA's missions and programs. Working at the press site are public affairs personnel, production teams, media tour guides, special project coordinators, writers, producers and Web-site operators. They include contractors as well as NASA civil service employees.

Public Affairs Officers/Staff

The staff at the NASA News Center guarantees quality distributions. Employees make certain the information KSC releases is as appealing as it is informative. Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) are NASA spokespersons who disperse official messages about the agency's latest exciting discoveries and accomplishments.

The News Center's photographers, film crews, editors, caption writers and the digital imagery team work to make those messages flawless, picture-perfect and engaging.

KSC PAOs are immersed in the latest developments of all operations. Each PAO is an expert in one or more areas within the space program. They provide information to media outlets so that NASA's endeavors are spread to the world.

PAOs accommodate the needs of press members reporting at the space center. They provide this help to ensure reporting at KSC is as easy as it is exciting.

In addition to the media, PAOs also keep KSC employees up to date on internal developments. This includes everything from technological breakthroughs to social events at the center. By keeping employees informed, PAOs help foster a community spirit.

All space shuttle and expendable launch vehicle press operations take place at the Launch Complex 39 press site, managed by the staff. Inside the site, media have available working space, printed informational materials and TV/photo operation access.

During launch periods, query desks assist media representatives. These desks are staffed by NASA scientists, mission sponsors and official NASA spokespersons. Also in operation during a launch period is the Transportation and Escort Coordination Counter. It opens prior to launch to handle arrangements for press tours and interview requests.

Web Site

The KSC home page (**www.nasa.gov/kennedy**) is produced and maintained at the press site. Because KSC is the agency's launch center, the Web site covers every aspect of the mission from start to finish.

Writers and producers at the press site are responsible for Web site content. The center's home page is accessible to the public, so information must be pertinent. Launch updates on the Web inform the public of the next human endeavor into space. The KSC Web site averages well over 100 million hits each year.

Feature stories and videos for the NASA home page are also written and produced at the press site. The agency's mission section of the home page is maintained at KSC. Yearly, the mission page receives more than 30 million hits.

Web Studio

KSC houses the agency's only Web studio, located at the press site. The studio produces educational outreach programs and launch and mission updates. Webcasting supports *NASA Direct!* This news broadcast is accessible to anyone interested in the latest space agency developments.

There are three work areas within the studio: the camera room, the audio-visual room and the Web production room. The camera room resembles a television studio. It contains TV cameras, a reporting desk and a green background screen that allows super-imposition of virtual backgrounds.

In the audio-visual room, experts monitor and control live programming, select live feeds, encode video, and distribute the feed to NASA's secure Web servers. The imagery is then transmitted to the Web for the world to view.

The Web production room converts various video footage to Web-ready formats.

Media Tours, Films, Special Projects

The Media Projects Group plans and implements tours, documentaries, film shoots and special projects at the press site. This group presents the best image of KSC to diverse media, providing NASA perspective and information. Responsibilities include:

- *Accrediting media for admittance into KSC and coordinating access to restricted sites.* To gain this access, the office must interface with NASA and contractor employees, as well as top management.
- *Assisting filming at the space center in every aspect.* From set-up to camera angles, the group provides expert knowledge to ensure quality filming. Most projects, like documentaries, last only a day or two. Filming for movies can require up to a week of full dedication.
- *Coordinating special events and projects.* Such events can include ribbon-cutting ceremonies and assisting book writers with research.

The Media Projects Group also has special functions during launch periods. It is responsible for media events that are conducted once the crew arrives, during training and for launch question-and-answer sessions with the space shuttle crews. The group transports the press to where they need to be for launch-day reporting.

Spaceport News

Spaceport News, a bi-weekly internal newspaper, emanates from the press site. The eight-page publication informs and educates KSC employees about newsworthy events, providing pertinent, feature-like information. Articles relating to the processing, launching and landing of spacecraft and payloads at KSC take precedence in the paper. Personnel information, awards, employee events and activities are also covered.

Libraries

There are two press site libraries at the News Center: the News Reference Library and the Multimedia Library. They house every type of NASA media footage or documentation.

The News Reference Library stocks official NASA printed materials. The small historical collection contains back issues of *Spaceport News* and other KSC publications. The librarian of the news reference library aids in research for the press, verifies facts for press site staff and stays in contact with KSC's main library, which is located at the Headquarters Building. Information is expediently retrieved when needed and no factoid is too obscure to find. The collection is not in circulation; only copies of articles can be taken.

The Multimedia Library promotes the word of NASA to the media by providing official resources that are loaned for free. The collection includes video and audio clips, compact discs, DVDs, still photos and Web imagery. The librarian assists any media personnel, as well as educational outlets, by researching what they need. Having proficient knowledge of the collection, the librarian can find the perfect footage, usually within minutes.

TV Production

The television studio, located on the News Center's north side, is owned by NASA and is staffed by contractor audio and visual experts. The studio produces press conferences that originate both at KSC and at other locations.

Media gather in the news conference auditorium at the NASA News Center to hear members of the STS-114 Mission Management Team rdiscuss work to be done prior to launch of Space Shuttle Discovery in July 2005.

The news conference auditorium seats 100 people and provides ample space for equipment. Countdown, prelaunch and post-launch briefings are held in the facility. Invited media view these briefings and participate in the question-and-answer sessions that follow. A NASA PAO moderates the conferences between the press and the attendants of the events.

Aside from press conferences, the studio produces training films, live television shots and special announcements.

Growth and changes

The years 2004 and 2005 brought many changes and upgrades to the press site. Hurricane damage in 2004 revealed aging defects in the grandstands, so they were demolished.

Many obsolete trailers in and near the parking lot that served various press were marked for removal.

Other trailers and buildings on top of the mound that also served the media were replaced with prefabricated structures: *Florida Today*, *The Orlando Sentinel, CNN* and Associated Press, for example.

To further accommodate media needs, another prefabricated building, named the News Center Annex, was built on top of the mound with phone, television and cable capabilities, including wireless Internet connectivity. This new facility is used for overflow media work space.

Permanent Facilities For Media

Seen below, NBC and CBS have buildings adjacent to the NASA News Center. CNN and the Associated Press maintain prefabricated structures at the site. Local broadcast media are accommodated, along with regional newspapers *Florida Today* and *The Orlando Sentinel*.

New prefab structures at upper right house CNN, Associated Press, local newspapers and other media.

The parking lot below the NASA News Center (center) was filled with cars and satellite trucks for the July 26, 2005, launch of Space Shuttle Discovery on the return-to-flight mission STS-114.

History of the Press Site

The location of the KSC press site is historic. Complex 39 was originally designed for Apollo-Saturn V space vehicles. The site was put to use for media relations after an open-door policy for the press to view launches began in 1958. Before that time, media traveled by bus from the NASA press offices in Cocoa Beach, Fla.

Anticipating media requirements for the Apollo program, KSC constructed a press site at Complex 39 that included trailers and a grandstand. The site was ready for reporting the Apollo 4 launch in 1967. In 1975 the press site was acknowledged as a Historic Site in Journalism by the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi. The plaque that recognizes "the largest corps of newsmen in history. . . to report fully and freely to the largest audience in history" still stands on an outbuilding at the press site.

The first shuttle launch in 1981 broke the record for attendance by press media and public relations professionals. It became apparent that a structure was necessary to house press covering space shuttle missions. In 1983 KSC built a geodesic dome, also known as the "Florida igloo," to replace the trailers. A permanent building replaced the dome in December 1995. The current building is 8,700 square feet and contains 15 offices.