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NASA PLANS SKYLAB ATTITUDE CHANGE PROCEDURES

As a result of successful contact with Skylab during interrogations from tracking stations in March and April, NASA will attempt a series of attitude change procedures with Skylab beginning early next month.

The activities, beginning June 1, involve putting a new computer program into the onboard computer, using the attitude control system to maneuver Skylab into the desired position and operating the control moment gyros to keep the spacecraft in that mode. These procedures should be completed by mid-June.

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These procedures are designed to establish control of the spacecraft and thereby extend its orbital lifetime by perhaps as much as 6 to 12 months. If these attitude change maneuvers are successful and the gyros continue to operate, Skylab's reentry into the Earth's atmosphere could be delayed until sometime between late 1979 and mid-1980. The maneuvers will decrease atmospheric drag on the spacecraft by orienting it to be aligned with the flight path.

If the desired attitude is achieved, Skylab then will be monitored on a daily basis. Hopefully, no additional maneuvers or adjustments will be necessary. A successful attitude change maneuver could provide sufficient time to carry out a Skylab reboost or controlled deorbit mission on an early Space Shuttle flight.