International Space Station (ISS) Orbital Debris Collision Avoidance Process

Presented by:
James S. Cooney
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Program Description

- Risk of orbital debris
- History of NASA orbital debris collision avoidance process prior to the ISS
- Current NASA orbital debris collision avoidance process for ISS
Business Problem – Risk of Orbital Debris

- Orbital debris presents one of the highest risks to the ISS
  - ISS is one of approximately 23,000 objects currently tracked by the Space Surveillance Network (SSN)
    - New objects enter the catalog (launches, debris generating events, deploys)
    - Old objects leave the catalog (directed deorbit, natural decay)
  - Debris has been collecting since the early space age
  - Oldest satellite in the catalog is over 60 years old
  - Collision between one of these objects and the ISS could be catastrophic
  - The joint American and Russian flight control teams have been prepared to maneuver the ISS out of the way should the threat of a collision trigger a certain threshold since the launch of the first ISS module
Technology Solution – Early DAM Process Pre ISS

- Pre-Challenger - little thought given to orbital debris
- Post-Challenger - refocused attention on flight safety
- A process was created to limit risk to Space Shuttles from orbital debris
- A box, centered on the Shuttle was defined, such that predicted violations by a cataloged object could result in a maneuver
  - Maneuvers not likely
    - low catalog count, Shuttle maneuverability, short duration missions
  - No maneuvers and few notifications prior to ISS related missions
ISS’s long duration, continuous space operations demanded more focus on debris

The Shuttle “shoebox” method was found to be inappropriate
  – Inconsistent with potential ISS and debris position uncertainties
  – Statistically inefficient: too many false positives and/or negatives
  – Predicted high debris avoidance maneuver rate
  – ISS limited maneuverability

A strict probability based method was investigated
  – Maneuvers based on risk of collision only
  – Screening volume and maneuver thresholds efficiently chosen to maximize protection while minimizing maneuver rate
  – But ... requires trajectory position uncertainties for debris and ISS
  – ISS need for high quality state uncertainty information drove joint NASA/USAF Space Command improvements now used by many US Government missions as well as a host of current commercial and foreign satellite owner/operators
Technology Solution – Current ISS DAM Process

• Propulsion Capability
  – All core propulsive capability is performed by the Russian segment controlled by Mission Control Center – Moscow (MCC-M)

• DAM ΔV
  – Typically ≤1m/s

• DAM propulsion source options
  – Progress resupply vehicle
  – Service Module (SM)

• DAM attitude
  – Dedicated attitude maneuver
  – Torque Equilibrium Attitude (TEA)
Technology Solution – Current ISS DAM Process

• Identify Risk
  – Personnel at the Joint Space Operations Center (JSpOC), located at Vandenberg Air Force Base, maintains a catalog of objects in orbit based on radar tracking
  – Screens the ISS trajectory against all other objects in the catalog three times per day
  – Notifies the ISS Trajectory Operations and Planning Officer (TOPO) if anything is predicted to pass within a ±2 km (local vertical) x 25 km x 25 km (local horizontal) volume within the next 72 hours
  – TOPO uses data from JSpOC to compute the probability of collision ($P_c$)
  – Based on a set of criteria, TOPO notifies flight control teams in Houston and Moscow of the potential collision hazard
    - Time of Closest Approach (TCA) ≤ 48 hours
    - Local vertical miss ≤ 0.5 km or $P_c \geq 1E^{-06}$ (1 in 1,000,000)
Technology Solution – Current ISS DAM Process

- When do you need to start DAM planning?
- How long can you wait before required to make the Go/No-Go decision?
- Hurricane Ike example below (September 2008)

Landfall – 48 hours

Landfall – 24 hours

Landfall – 5 hours

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Technology Solution – Current ISS DAM Process

• Maneuver Decision
  – TOPO continues to refine $P_c$ as new tracking information arrives on both ISS and threat object
  – TOPO monitors trends in orbit determination, covariance behavior, miss distance, and $P_c$
  – Flight Rules govern when a DAM should be performed to minimize risk of collision
    ▪ $P_c$ threshold to maneuver depends on ISS activities underway or planned in near future
    ▪ Flight Rules dictate the exceptions to perform a DAM
      – Example – inbound crewed Soyuz has launched requires higher $P_c$ to warrant a DAM
    ▪ Action thresholds:
      – Black $P_c \geq 1.0 \times 10^{-2}$ (1 in 100)
      – Red $P_c \geq 1.0 \times 10^{-4}$ (1 in 10,000)
      – Yellow $P_c \geq 1.0 \times 10^{-5}$ (1 in 100,000)
      – Green $P_c < 1.0 \times 10^{-5}$ (no action taken)
Technology Solution – Current ISS DAM Process

• Maneuver Execution – Legacy Debris Avoidance Maneuver (DAM)
  – Dedicated command script (cyclogram) built by Moscow flight controllers uplinked to ISS
  – Pros:
    ▪ Custom ΔV within vehicle capability – useful if eliminating near-term planned reboost
    ▪ ISS can maneuver from any attitude to the DAM attitude LVLH YPR 0,0,0 or 180,0,0 deg
  – Cons:
    ▪ Requires approximately 24-hours notice due to requirements to run on dedicated test stand
      – Late-notice conjunctions with high risk
        ➢ Crew must shelter-in-place inside Soyuz
      – Risk of debris not always known well at 24-hour decision point
        ➢ Unused work - DAM planning which is ultimately canceled once risk decreased below action thresholds
Technology Solution – Current ISS DAM Process

- Maneuver Execution – Pre-determined Debris Avoidance Maneuver (PDAM)
  - New operation late 2012 and primary method for ISS DAM
  - Pre-canned cyclogram executed by MCC-M or the crew 1 hour before the PDAM ignition
  - Normally, ignition occurs ~2 hr 20 min prior to closest approach
  - ΔV options (expanded from original 0.5 m/s only option)
    - 0.3, 0.5, 0.7, 1.0 m/s using aft engines (Progress, Service Module)
    - 0.3, 0.5 m/s using Progress docked to DC1-nadir port
  - PDAM can be performed from either LVLH YPR 0,0,0 or 180,0,0 deg attitude
- Pros
  - Decision point to perform maneuver as late as 5 hr 20 min prior to closest approach
    - Long pole is getting ISS US systems configured for reboost (appendages in position and power down, if required)
    - Reduced unused work
    - Reduced chance of ISS crew needing to shelter-in-place for high-risk conjunctions
- Cons
  - ΔV limited to discrete options
  - ISS must be near LVLH YPR 0,0,0 or 180,0,0 attitude for PDAM cyclogram to initiate
Future Roadmap

• PDAM Enhancements in work
  – Later PDAM options
    ▪ Houston and Moscow flight control team personnel working together to allow PDAM to occur NLT 30 minutes prior to closest approach
    ▪ Allows planning process to start NLT 3hr 30 min prior to closest approach
  – ISS maneuvers from any attitude to preferred PDAM attitude
    ▪ Currently, ISS must be near either the LVLH YPR 0,0,0 deg or 180,0,0 deg attitude to initiate PDAM
    ▪ ISS may not be near either option for PDAM initiation
    ▪ Best PDAM attitude may the option opposite of current operations
      – Example - retrograde PDAM may be preferable in some circumstances
James S. Cooney (Jim)

Email: jscooney@sgt-inc.com or james.s.cooney@nasa.gov

Phone: (281)-483-2102