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USSR: The Soviets apparently are trying to improve their space suit technology in anticipation of future manned space requirements.

At a recent meeting of the joint US-USSR working group in space biology and medicine, Soviet participants showed great interest in the space suits used in the Apollo lunar landings. They mentioned a pending Soviet request to the National Aeronautical and Space Administration to buy several space suits from the US manufacturer.

The Soviets have not used pressurized space suits on manned flights since 1969, apparently believing them unnecessary for missions that do not involve activity outside their spacecraft. The Soyuz 11 cosmonauts who died during re-entry last year probably would have survived the sudden depressurization of their capsule if they had been wearing pressurized suits. The couches in the Soyuz re-entry capsule, however, could not have accommodated the three cosmonauts wearing the bulky Soviet suits.

Soviet development of space suits has lagged considerably behind US efforts. Those used by the US on Apollo flights are more compact and flexible than Soviet versions, allowing astronauts considerable freedom of movement. The advanced technology of US suits would help the Soviets in designing space suits for future Soyuz missions. A US-type suit also would be essential for a Soviet lunar landing where mobility would be a critical factor, although such a landing attempt is not likely for several years.

Changes in the Soyuz spacecraft probably were made as a result of the Soyuz 11 accident and were tested earlier this month during the flight of Cosmos 496--an unmanned Soyuz vehicle. As a safety precaution, the Soviets may also introduce a new

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space suit or a modified version of an older model during the next space mission. There are indications that the Soviets are planning a manned space flight within the next few weeks, and it probably will involve another extended stay by cosmonauts aboard a Salyut space station.

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