

Normally, to stop this happening, astronauts use a type of filter device called a scrubber. Mission Control sent the astronauts a message saying there were some scrubbers in the capsule which could be used to solve the problem. Unfortunately they were square, not circular, which meant they wouldn't fit in the Lunar Module, so the air inside continued to get more and more poisonous.

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If something wasn't done quickly the crew would die, but luckily someone had an idea. A team of engineers on the ground started experimenting with various pieces of equipment. Using only the same items the astronauts had on board the spacecraft, and working as fast as possible, they had to devise a way to make the square scrubbers fit the circular fixtures in the Lunar Module. If they could solve this problem it might enable the astronauts to breathe the air inside for a little bit longer. Eventually they found a way to do this. As quickly as they could they explained to the crew how they had used socks, plastic bags and some ordinary sticky tape to modify the scrubbers. The crew tried doing the same thing and it worked! The result looked messy, and they knew it wouldn't last for long, but it was a brilliant solution which kept the air supply safe for a little while longer.

After this it still took several more hours to calculate when to fire the last remaining rocket, and for how long. The tension was growing unbearable, and three lives hung in the balance, but finally the rocket was fired. Apollo 13 slowly turned and began moving in the right direction. Eventually the men returned to their capsule and, after separating from the damaged rocket section, they re-entered the Earth's atmosphere