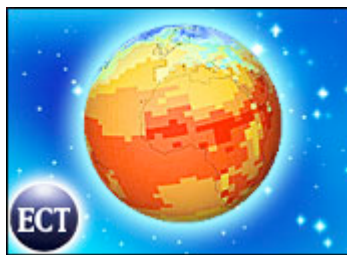






Please note that this material is copyright protected. It is illegal to display or reproduce this article without permission for any commercial purpose, including use as marketing or public relations literature. To obtain reprints of this article for authorized use, please call a sales representative at (818) 461-9700 or visit <http://www.ectnews.com/about/reprints/>.

SCIENCE

US to Severely Curtail Global Warming Satellite Monitoring



By John Heilprin
AP
06/05/07 7:49 AM PT

 [Print Version](#)
 [E-Mail Article](#)
 [Digg It](#)
 [Reprints](#)

The Bush administration is dramatically decreasing global warming measuring efforts from space. Instead of replacing aging satellites by launching six new satellites in three orbits as originally planned, it will launch four satellites pared into two orbits. Although the satellites

were intended to gather climate and weather data, they will now focus on weather forecasting.

The Bush administration is drastically scaling back efforts to measure global warming from space, just as the president tries to convince the world the U.S. is ready to take the lead in reducing greenhouse gases.

A confidential report to the White House, obtained by The Associated Press, warns that U.S. scientists will soon lose much of their ability to monitor warming from space using a costly and problem-plagued satellite initiative begun more than a decade ago.

Because of technology glitches and a near-doubling in the original US\$6.5 billion cost, the Defense Department has decided to downsize and launch four satellites paired into two orbits, instead of six satellites and three orbits.

Relying on European Satellites

The satellites were intended to gather weather and climate [data](#), replacing existing satellites as they come to the end of their useful lifetimes beginning in the next couple of years.

The reduced system of four satellites will now focus on weather forecasting. Most of the climate instruments needed to collect more precise data over long periods are being eliminated.

Instead, the Pentagon and two partners -- the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) and [NASA](#) -- will rely on European satellites for most of the climate data.

"Unfortunately, the recent loss of climate sensors ... places the overall climate [program](#) in serious jeopardy," NOAA and NASA scientists told the White House in the Dec. 11 report obtained by the AP.

They said they will face major gaps in data that can be collected only from satellites about ice caps and sheets, surface levels of seas and lakes, sizes of glaciers, surface radiation, water vapor, snow cover and atmospheric carbon dioxide.

'Criminal Negligence'

Rick Piltz, director of Climate Science Watch, a watchdog program of the Washington-based Government Accountability Project, called the situation a crisis.

"We're going to start being blinded in our ability to observe the planet," said Piltz, whose group provided the AP with the previously undisclosed report. "It's criminal negligence, and the leaders in the climate science community are ringing the alarm bells on this crisis."

Bush has repeatedly cited his administration's record on researching global warming as a response to criticism of his opposition to forced reductions in the greenhouse gases blamed for it. The administration has been spending about \$5 billion a year on global warming: \$2 billion on climate research and \$3 billion on technologies for combating it.

Last week, the president proposed the idea of the 15 largest global-warming polluters -- the U.S. is the largest, followed closely by China -- [meeting](#) to set goals for fixing the problem while leaving it up to each nation just how to do it.

The problem will be a major topic at this week's summit of world leaders in Europe.

Bush requested \$331 million for work on the scaled-back satellite system next year in his fiscal 2008 budget proposal. Congress has yet to act on it.

Major Gaps

The American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Academy of Sciences have both cautioned that downsizing the satellite program will result in major gaps in the continuity and quality of the data gathered about the Earth from space.

NASA and NOAA agreed in April to restore sensors that will enable the satellites to map ozone. NOAA Administrator Conrad Lautenbacher said that would give scientists a better idea of the content and distribution of atmospheric gases.

However, seven other separate climate sensors are still being eliminated or substantially downgraded by lower-quality equipment to save money, according to the report to the White House. Most of the satellites, which were scheduled to launch starting next year, have been delayed to between 2013 and 2026.

White House science adviser Jack Marburger, for whom the report was intended, acknowledged that climate scientists had been depending greatly on the planned satellites.

"We're obviously very concerned about this," he told the AP. "It got in trouble and we couldn't fit all those instruments on it ... leaving us with a number of problems and questions: How do we maintain our momentum in this very important area of science?"

'No Hope of Recovery'

Rep. Bart Gordon, D-Tenn., who chairs the House Committee on Science and Technology, called for a hearing later this week on the satellite program. Gordon believes Lautenbacher should resign, the panel's spokesperson said.

The committee wants to hear from Marburger and the satellite program's director, Air Force Brig. Gen. Susan Mashiko, and to receive an update from congressional investigators.

"You're looking at a program that's roughly \$6 billion over budget with no hope of recovery," said Alisha Prather, the spokesperson. "They can't even tell us when different pieces of the puzzle may be functional. ... It's failed leadership."

Anson Franklin, a spokesperson for Lautenbacher, said he would have no comment Monday.

NASA spokesperson Tabatha Thompson told the AP a final version of the "impacts" report was delivered to Marburger on Jan. 8. It was not made public because it is "a pre-decisional document within the administration," she said.

NASA and NOAA also are looking for guidance from the National Research Council, which is holding a workshop on the satellites this month. Chet Koblinsky, director of NOAA's climate program office, told the council the satellites "represented the cornerstone of the nation's future space-based climate research program," according to PowerPoint slides obtained by AP.

Scheduling Problems


The delays were caused in part because of problems with an infrared sensor that officials either didn't monitor closely enough or didn't bring to the attention of their managers, the Commerce Department's inspector general reported last year. That report also said a contractor on the project was receiving excessive fees.

The National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System, or NPOESS, was first announced in 1994. It was an effort to combine weather-forecasting satellites operated by the Defense Department and NOAA and add climate data-gathering instruments.

The plans also involved the European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites and the National Space Development Agency of Japan.

By 2005, however, the Government Accountability Office, an investigative arm of Congress, found the costs for the U.S. satellites could run to \$9.7 billion and were almost a year and a half behind schedule. The Pentagon last year pegged the cost at \$11.5 billion and found that it was further behind schedule.

Jerry Mahlman, a former scientist at NOAA who is now at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, said he and other colleagues warned of problems as far back as 1995.

He compared the preparations for the satellites to a "planned train wreck." 

© 2007 Associated Press. All rights reserved.

© 2007 ECT News Network. All rights reserved.

▶ **Next Article in Science: [Frenzy of Shuttle Missions to Follow Atlantis Launch](#)**

Related Resources

- [Podcast: Physical Layer Switches Protocoltools.com](#)
- [Files2U: Designed for End-Users to Share Large Files](#)
- [Viking Data Entry \(VDE\) power/precision data entry software](#)

Copyright © 1998-2007 ECT News Network, Inc. All Rights Reserved. See [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). [How To Advertise](#).