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NASA Fact Sheet

What Independent Experts Are Saying About The CASSINI - HUYGENS Mission To Saturn

"A fantastic group of worlds await us at Saturn with much to teach us and our children. Saturn's complex system of rings and satellites, not to mention the planet itself, awaits exploration with a treasure trove of new discoveries. The search for understanding our solar system, the planets, the chemical and physical conditions and processes that shape our environment, and the origin and evolution of life are the greatest adventures in our lifetimes."

Dr. Louis Friedman
The Planetary Society, Pasadena, CA
626/793-5100

"Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generators (RTGs) are tested under more severe shock, temperature, and pressure conditions than any component ever built. The best example of the success of their design was when the worst imaginable accident did happen: a Titan rocket carrying a payload containing an RTG blew up seconds after launch..the RTG not only wasn't damaged, it was fished out of the bay, polished up a bit, and launched on a subsequent mission. RTGs are designed to prevent dispersal of the fuel even under the most severe conditions of an exploding launch vehicle or an uncontrolled reentry into the Earth's atmosphere from space...The value of the knowledge gained by these missions, and the consequent benefits to humanity, far outweigh the tiny risk involved."

Jerry Grey, PhD
Director of Science and Technology Policy, AIAA
Visiting Professor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Princeton University
212/595-7102

"Contrary to some outlandish claims of horrible consequences associated with the use of RTG power supplies in the Cassini probe, there is actually little risk to anyone from accidental releases of plutonium. Accidental re-entry into the earth's atmosphere could lead to the release and dispersion into the atmosphere of up to about 1% of the plutonium-238 contained within the RTG. There is no known or expected risk associated with such small radiation exposures."

Prof. Otto G. Raabe, Ph.D., CHP
Professor of Radiation Health Biophysics and Radionuclide Toxicology at the Institute of Toxicology and Environmental Health, and President, Health Physics Society, Institute of Toxicology & Environmental Health (ITEH) Univ. of Calif., Davis 916/752-7754

"...Opponents of RTGs are expected to take last-minute legal steps to block the Oct. 6 launch. There is concern that demonstrators might even attempt to physically interfere with the launch...There is more at stake than Cassini...It could set a precedent that would effectively end exploration of the outer reaches of the solar system -- there simply is no practical substitute for RTGs at this point...Pioneer 10 was powered by an RTG for 25 years until it was abandoned more than six billion miles from Earth."

Dr. Robert L. Park
American Physical Society, Washington, DC
202/662-8700

"Saying 'no' to Cassini would be saying 'no' to knowledge. Cassini, planned for years to reveal the secrets of Saturn, its rings and mysterious

system of satellites, will provide invaluable data and another unforgettable rendezvous with images we've never seen before. Saying 'no' to Cassini would jeopardize years of international preparation and investment. Misinformation and exaggerated claims of risk should not be allowed to slam the door on deep space discovery. Cassini's RTGs, which occupy the center of current debate, have proven their safety and capability in 23 prior missions, including human missions. RTGs are the only realistic option for sending probes great distances from the Sun and will certainly play a part in future human missions. The National Space Society fully supports the launch of Cassini."

Charlie Walker

President, National Space Society, Washington, DC

202/543-1900

Other experts available for interviews

- Dr. Gary Bennett, aerospace power design and testing engineer, 208/365-1210
- Michael Gilbrook, Chapter President, National Space Society, Orlando, Fla. 407/872-7801
- Dr. George Voelz, Los Alamos National Laboratory, expert on radiation safety, 505/667-8956
- Dwayne A. Day, Policy Analyst, Space Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 202/994-7292
- Dr. Carolyn Porco, University of Arizona, Cassini Imaging Team Leader, 520/621-8716
- Dr. Jonathan Lunine, Cassini Interdisciplinary Scientist, University of Arizona, Tucson, 602/621-2789
- Dr. Bernard Cohen, Physics Dept., Univ. of Pittsburgh; expert on hazards from plutonium, 412/624-9245

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