



Inaugural International COSPAR Planetary Protection Week: Set to Inspire Global Collaboration in London

15 April 2024

London, UK and Paris, France – 15 April 2024. The Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) is proud to announce the Inaugural International COSPAR Planetary Protection Week (ICPPW), funded by the UK Space Agency (UKSA), organised by AstrobiologyOU at the Open University, and co-sponsored by Cornell University and ESA. The week is scheduled to take place from 22 to 25 April 2024, in London, UK. This landmark event will bring together leading experts, scientists, policymakers and space agencies from around the world to advance the critical objective of planetary protection.

With an increasing number of space missions targeting various celestial bodies, including Mars, Europa, and the Moon, the importance of maintaining the integrity of these environments while protecting our own biosphere has never been greater. The ICPPW will serve as a platform for promoting international collaboration and knowledge exchange on best practice in planetary protection.

The event will feature a range of sessions, meetings, as well as panel discussions, covering key topics such as the current and future landscape of planetary protection, implementation of planetary protection requirements, the limits of life, sample return, and examining specific categories for Mars and icy worlds. Space agencies, including CNSA, ESA, ISRO, JAXA, NASA, and UAE Space Agency, will be reporting on their exploration to different bodies in the Solar System, and during the week representatives will give a briefing on their planetary protection activity. Industry and the commercial sector will also be present and taking part. In-person and online participants will therefore have the opportunity to interact with major stakeholders in the exploration and planetary protection field, share insights, and forge the partnerships that are vital in developing sustainable space exploration missions.

"We are excited to hold the Inaugural International COSPAR Planetary Protection Week in collaboration with the UK Space Agency," said Professor Pascale Ehrenfreund, President of COSPAR. "This event represents a significant milestone in our collective efforts to ensure the responsible exploration and preservation of celestial bodies for future generations."

COSPAR Chair of the Panel on Planetary Protection, Dr Athena Coustenis, said "By bringing together experts from across disciplines and borders, we hope to ensure a sustainable and safe exploration of our neighbourhood and to catalyze new ideas and initiatives that will shape the future of planetary protection."

The Open University's Professor Karen Olsson-Francis, the UKSA's representative on the COSPAR Panel on Planetary Protection, said, "We are delighted to host this inaugural event, demonstrating the UKSA's commitment to ensuring space is used and explored in sustainable and responsible ways."

The collaboration with UKSA and the other 11 space agencies represented in the COSPAR Panel on Planetary Protection underscores the interest of all stakeholders and the need for coordination among them to ensure consensus on the preservation of scientific exploration. By bringing together international stakeholders, the Inaugural ICPPW aims to spur advancements in planetary protection requirements.

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As this issue is of growing interest to wider society, a public outreach panel is organised for the evening of 25 April at the Geological Society of London.

The Inaugural COSPAR International Planetary Protection Week will take place at the Royal Society in London, UK and online. Registration for online places at the event is now open. For more information, interested parties are invited to [register here](#).

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Note to Editors

COSPAR, the Committee on Space Research, was created in 1958, at the dawn of the space age, under the aegis of the International Council of Scientific Unions, now the [International Science Council \(ISC\)](#). COSPAR's objectives are to promote on an international level scientific research in space, with emphasis on the exchange of results, information and opinions, and to provide a forum, open to all scientists, for the discussion of problems affecting space research. In its first years of existence as an entity that ignores political considerations and views all questions solely from the scientific standpoint, COSPAR played an important role as an open bridge between East and West for cooperation in space. When this role became less prominent with the end of the Cold War, COSPAR focused its objectives on the progress of all kinds of research carried out with the use of space means.

COSPAR has played a central role in the development of new space disciplines such as life sciences and fundamental physics in space, by facilitating the interaction between scientists in emerging space fields and senior space researchers. Another recent inclusion in our portfolio concerns social sciences and humanities, which aims to provide opportunities for COSPAR to engage with SSH communities, including in the education area, and gives a role to our organization that is commensurate with today's interaction of space matters with the broader society.

A recent emphasis is the development of tighter bonds between science and industry, through the establishment of the Committee on Industry Relations, grouping 18 major aerospace companies worldwide, and advising COSPAR on how best to integrate the capabilities of industry into COSPAR's activities and by doing so, to best serve the interests of industry and science in a synergistic way.

COSPAR strives to promote the use of space science for the benefit of humanity and for its adoption by developing countries and new space-faring nations, in particular through a series of Capacity Building Workshops which teach very practical skills enabling researchers to participate in international space research programs.

COSPAR advises, as required, the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations on space research matters and on the assessment of scientific issues in which space can play a role, for example the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), in which COSPAR is a Participating Organization.

COSPAR fulfils its responsibilities to provide accepted guidelines on planetary protection to guide compliance with the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and other



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international agreements. This is managed through the work of the COSPAR Panel on Planetary Protection.

Lastly, COSPAR is the key entity worldwide in terms of developing, maintaining and promulgating clearly delineated policies and requirements as to the standards that must be achieved to protect against the harmful effects of biological interchange in the conduct of solar system exploration and use.



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About Open University

The Open University is the largest academic institution in the UK and a world leader in flexible distance learning. Since it began in 1969, the OU has taught more than 2 million students worldwide. There are over 170,000 current students, including more than 15,000 overseas. The Open University's mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas is delivered through its values of inclusivity, innovation and responsiveness.

Within its mission it states a commitment to create world-class research. AstrobiologyOU (Director, Prof Olsson-Francis) is a multidisciplinary research group working collaboratively to address the scientific, governance and ethical challenges associated with the advancement of astrobiology and related space exploration missions. The group are based at The Open University campus in Milton Keynes, UK, with their staff and laboratory infrastructure supported by funding from UKSA and the UK Research and Innovation's research councils, including Research England, who provided £6.7 million to facilitate the group's expansion. Planetary Protection is one of the group's major research themes.

AstrobiologyOU and The Open University's research is widely disseminated to the public, through courses on our free learning platform [OpenLearn](#), and for over 50 years [the OU has produced programmes with the BBC](#), designed to engage millions of viewers and listeners with entertaining, informative and educational content. OU academics are consultants on these programmes, providing expert insight and research-based contributions.

About UK Space Agency

The UK Space Agency plays a major role in delivering the UK government's National Space Strategy by catalysing investment into the space sector, delivering missions and capabilities, and championing space for the benefit of life on Earth.

Our way of life on Earth depends on space. Satellites forecast the weather, keep businesses connected and products moving, and monitor our natural environment. They underpin the UK's economy and support our critical national infrastructure.



To achieve the greatest impact, the Agency focuses most of its resource behind eight delivery Priorities. These are:

- launch: supporting satellite launch services from UK spaceports
- sustainability: taking a leading role in keeping space safe and accessible now and in the future
- discovery: supporting space science and exploration missions
- innovation: investing in bold new technologies
- levelling-up: boosting space investment and jobs across the country
- Earth observation: studying our planet to drive discovery and tackle climate change
- low-Earth orbit: delivering vital everyday satellite services
- inspiration: inspiring new space customers, investors and the next generation

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