

Simulated Mars Mission Enters Mock Orbit

The crew of a simulated mission to Mars have entered virtual orbit around the planet in what BBC News reporters are calling a "key milestone" for the project, which intends to study the physical and mental effect that a real-life Mars mission might have on astronauts.

The Mars500 mission, which is being conducted by the Institute of Biomedical Problems in Russia with cooperation from the European Space Agency (ESA), features six men who have been sealed inside steel containers representing replica spacecraft, BBC Science Correspondent Jonathan Amos wrote on Tuesday.

Their next mission will be to take their first steps on a mock-Mars surface, which is currently scheduled to occur on February 14, according to the Mars500 website.

That simulation will require the half-dozen volunteers to depart from a mock landing vehicle onto an environmental simulation of Mars, with Russia's Mission Control Center overseeing their operations. Furthermore, the website notes that communications between the crew and the mission control personnel will be intentionally delayed by 20 minutes to simulate real-time radio delays.

"So far, I must say we've had no major problems," Martin Zell, head of the ESA's International Space Station (ISS) scientific program, told Amos. "There is permanent monitoring, so we understand their health very well. We have a lot of data now on their mental state and on how their bodies are reacting. That's important because there is a link between the two."

The six person crew includes three Russian cosmonauts, two individuals from Europe, and a Chinese national astronaut: Alexander Smoleevskiy, Sukhrob Kamolov, Alexey Sitev, Diego Urbina, Romain Charles and Wang Yue.

They will be involved in a total of 100 experiments during their mission, and will be thoroughly examined by medical professionals to determine how much wear and tear their bodies and minds will endure during the 520 day study, which is scheduled to end in November.

On the Net:

- [Mars500](#)
- [Institute of Biomedical Problems](#)
- [European Space Agency \(ESA\)](#)

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