

The Voice of Russia

US' "answer" to Russian mock flight to Mars

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Photo: EPA



The US has started an experiment which has already been nicknamed "the answer to the Russian "Mars-500"".

The "Mars-500" experiment, currently held in Moscow, is an imitation of a manned flight to Mars. 6 volunteers are taking part in it.

Unlike the Russian experiment, is US equivalent, called "the NASA Extreme Environment Mission Operations", or "the NEEMO-15", is a simulation of a flight to an asteroid. However, the organizers look upon it as just the first stage in training for more complicated flights, including those to Mars.

President Barak Obama has ordered NASA to send a flight to Mars no later than in 2025.

Like in the Russian experiment, there are also 6 crew members in the American one. They will spend 13 days in an underwater laboratory named "Aquarius", which is no bigger in size than a bus, 62 feet under water south of California.

"Aquarius" was built in the 1980s.

The head of the "space expedition" is 51-year old Shannon Walker. In 2010, she spent about 6 months on the Russian International Space Station.

Besides Ms. Walker, there are 3 Americans, a Canadian and a Japanese in the team.

Now, why is NASA trying to simulate a mission to an asteroid, and not to Mars?

"A mission to an asteroid is more realistic," a NASA expert John Charles said in an interview to the Voice of Russia.

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Some people say that the instruments which the experiment's participants are using – hooks and the like – are

too primitive and may become outdated when the real mission sets off. John Charles's response to that is as follows:

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NASA has been watching the Russian "Mars-500" experiment with great interest. However, according to John Charles, if NASA also decides to simulate a mission to Mars, it will last 1,000 days, not 520 as in the Russian experiment.

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The Russian "Mars-500" experiment is taking place in the Moscow Institute for Medical and Biological Studies. The 6 volunteers are locked in a facility which resembles a spaceship. Currently, the last stage of the "flight", which is supposed to last for 520 days, is under way. According to the scenario, the "cosmonauts" have already "flown back from Mars", and are now "on a near-earth orbit".