

Mars500 project – lands back on Earth after 520 days

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Moscow, Nov 5 (TruthDive): Six men who spent 18 months locked in steel tubes for a year-and-a-half to simulate a mission to Mars have emerged from isolation.

The Mars500 project was designed to assess the reaction of the human mind and body to the stresses of a potential spaceflight to Earth's nearest planetary neighbour. The European Space Agency researchers – three Russians, a Frenchman, an Italian-Colombian and a Chinese – spent 520 days inside windowless "modules".

The six had personal items such as books, films and personal laptops during their stay at the facility in Moscow's Institute for Biomedical Problems.

Scientists placed all six male volunteers in isolation in 2010 to simulate a mission to Mars, part of the European Space Agency's experiment to determine challenges facing future space travelers. The crew has now been taken away into quarantine for medical checks.

Data from the mission will give experts an idea of how the mind and body would cope with a long spaceflight to the Red Planet.

"The international crew has completed the 520-day mission," Commander Alexey Sitev reported to gathered officials. "The programme has been fully carried out. All the crew members are in good health. We are now ready for further tests."

Psychologists said conditions were sometimes more challenging on mock missions because the crew would not experience any of the euphoria or dangers of actual space travel. However, the crew showed no sign of stress as they talked to journalists.

For much of the Mars500 project, the six had only limited contact with the outside world. Their spaceship had no windows, and the protocols demanded their communications endured a similar time lag to that encountered by real messages as they travel the vast distance between Earth and Mars.

The crew kept in touch with their families and Russian space officials via the internet, which was delayed and occasionally disrupted to imitate the effects of space travel. They ate canned food similar to that offered on the International Space Station.

Organisers said each crew member would be paid about \$100,000 (£62,000), except the Chinese researcher, whose reward has not been revealed by Chinese officials.

Nasa aims to land on a nearby asteroid by 2025 and Mars in the 2030s.

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