

Landsat 5 Experiencing Technical Difficulties

On 26th November 2005, the back-up solar array drive on Landsat 5 began exhibiting unusual behaviour. The solar array drive maintains the proper pointing angle between the solar array and the sun. The rotation of the solar array drive became sporadic and the solar array was not able to provide the power needed to charge the batteries. Maintaining power to the batteries is critical to sustain proper operation of the spacecraft. The primary solar array drive failed under similar circumstances last January. As a result of this current situation, imaging operations will be suspended for at least the next two weeks or until attempts to solve the problem have been resolved.

Landsat 5, launched in March 1984, has performed far beyond its three-year design lifetime and has continued to collect global land surface coverage. Over 125,000 images have proven invaluable for identifying the impact of natural and human-induced changes. Landsat 5 and Landsat 7 together provide full global coverage of the Earth's surface every eight days.

The Landsat Program is the longest running program providing vital images of the Earth's surface from space. The first Landsat satellite was launched in 1972 and since then, Landsat satellites have been providing a constant stream of moderate-resolution images. In 1999, the Landsat Program took a giant leap forward technologically with the launch of Landsat 7. The instruments on the Landsat satellites have acquired millions of images of the surface of the planet, providing a unique resource for scientists who study agriculture, geology, forestry, regional planning, education, mapping and global change research.

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