

British climate satellite to be launched

October 5 2005

A British satellite designed to give an extremely accurate picture of climate changes at the Earth's poles is set for launch Saturday from Plesetsk, Russia.

U.K. researchers say the Cryosat spacecraft will provide a map of ice thickness across the Arctic for the first time.

The European Space Agency mission has been designed to obtain definitive data on the rates at which the planet's white caps are shrinking.

"What Cryosat is going to do for us is understand just how much ice is being converted to water, and just how fast that's happening," explained chief scientist Professor Duncan Wingham.

"We need that information partly to find out how fast change is occurring and partly to find out what are the longer and wider effects of that change," the University College London researcher told the BBC.

Cryosat is to lift-off on a converted military missile and circle the Earth in a polar orbit for three years, providing better coverage than existing satellites that miss a third of the Arctic Ocean, the BBC reported.

The new satellite is equipped with electronic devices that will reportedly measure the height of ice sheets and sea ice with unprecedented accuracy.

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Citation: British climate satellite to be launched (2005, October 5) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-10-british-climate-satellite.html>

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