

CryoSat set for launch

October 8 2005

It's all systems go for the CryoSat spacecraft launch from Russia, European Space Agency officials said Friday.

The satellite, scheduled to take off Saturday from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in Russia, carries a sophisticated radar altimeter that will measure the height and angle of ice surfaces with unprecedented precision, reported the BBC Friday.

CryoSat is the first of the European Space Agency's Earth Explorer missions -- relatively low-cost projects to answer important environmental questions.

The satellite's unique radar altimeter will see ice masses at vastly improved resolutions, to help determine if the apparent ice cover changes are due to ice melting or to changes in the winds that shift the ice around.

"The only way to do this is to examine the entire Arctic at the same time," said Duncan Wingham, of University College London.

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