NASA researchers 'see' the sun's far side

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NASA announced Thursday it has, for the first time, seen through the sun to the star's far side.

The feat was accomplished using the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory spacecraft. The sun's far side faces away from the Earth, so it is not directly observable by traditional techniques.

"This new method allows more reliable advance warning of magnetic storms brewing on the far side that could rotate with the sun and threaten the Earth," said NASA-supported scientist Phil Scherrer of Stanford University.

Magnetic storms resulting from violent solar activity disrupt satellites, radio communications, power grids and other technological systems on Earth, but advance warning helps planners prepare for operational disruptions.

The new observation method uses SOHO's Michelson Doppler Imager instrument to trace sound waves reverberating through the sun to build a picture of the far side.

"The original far-side imaging method only allowed us to see the central regions, about one-quarter to one-third of its total area," Scherrer said. "The new method allows us to see the entire far side, including the poles."

SOHO is a cooperative project of the European Space Agency and

NASA.