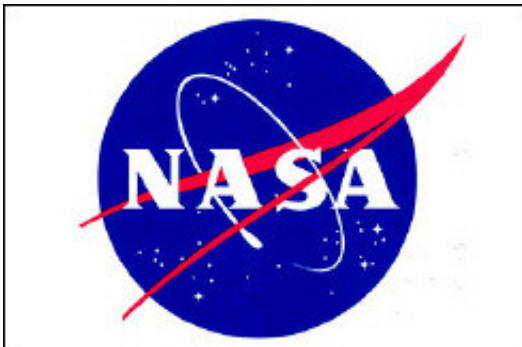


Earth dropped from NASA mission statement

July 24 2006



NASA has reportedly eliminated the promise "to understand and protect our home planet" from its mission statement.

That statement was repeatedly cited last winter by NASA climate scientist James Hansen, who said he was being threatened by political appointees for speaking about the dangers posed by greenhouse gas emissions.

But NASA officials told The New York Times the elimination of the phrase that was used by Hansen was "pure coincidence." The statement now proclaims the agency's mission is "to pioneer the future in space exploration, scientific discovery and aeronautics research."

A NASA spokesman said the change brings the agency into line with U.S. President George W. Bush's goal of pursuing human spaceflight to the moon and Mars.

One observer noted results from NASA's increasing involvement in monitoring the Earth's environment have sparked political disputes concerning the Bush administration's environmental policies.

Hansen said the elimination of the phrase involving protecting the planet might reflect a White House desire to shift the spotlight away from global warming.

He told The Times: "They're making it clear that they ... prefer that NASA work on something that's not causing them a problem."

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