

Google Earth impacts science

August 1 2006

The world's scientists are increasingly using Google Earth's digital globe, which has also attracted millions of non-scientists around the world.

Although Google Earth wasn't intended for scientific work -- merely as an entertainment feature -- the Google search engine's extraordinary globe has become useful for such widely differing functions as tracking diminishing ice sheets, locating crime scenes and monitoring volcanoes, Der Spiegel reported Tuesday.

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck the U.S. mainland, Google Earth added 8,000 post-disaster aerial photographs of flooded areas, helping disaster workers locate passable roads and other data, the newspaper said.

The free Google Earth basic program consists of hundreds of thousands of satellite and aerial photos that are updated periodically. The increasing popular program allows users to view their homes or any other area of interest around the world in a matter of seconds.

Google Earth's popularity among ordinary users is influencing the entire scientific community. "Google Earth offers globally available data in a very straightforward manner," Klaus Greve of the Geographic Institute at the University of Bonn told Der Spiegel. "It's also very appealing to researchers who were previously intimidated by (geo-information systems) software."

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Citation: Google Earth impacts science (2006, August 1) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-08-google-earth-impacts-science.html>

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