

Budget cuts may ax powerful telescopes

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U.S. federal science officials said budget constraints may force the closure of the Arecibo dish and the Very Long Baseline Array telescope network.

A committee recommended the National Science Foundation in Arlington, Va., shut down the Arecibo dish in Puerto Rico and the VLBA network by 2011 if it cannot find organizations willing to share annual operating costs of about \$8 million and \$11 million, respectively, NewScientist.com said. The closures were part of the committee's recommended \$30 million reduction in the foundation's operating budget.

Scientists and researchers who operate both telescope programs said they would work to find others willing to assist financially, NewScientist.com said.

Arecibo is the world's most sensitive radio telescope, NewScientist.com said. The giant antenna is fixed, but the Earth's rotation on its axis and movement of a receiver suspended above the reflective dish allow it to scan about 40 percent of the sky over a year.

The VLBA is a network of 10 radio dishes stretching from Hawaii to the Virgin Islands, offering what scientists said is unmatched resolution at radio wavelengths, NewScientist.com said. The network led to discoveries of cosmic jets and studies of galaxies powered by black holes.

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