Salt-seeking instrument blanketed in silver

January 25 2011, By Alan Buis

NASA technicians install thermal blankets on the Aquarius instrument at Brazil's National Institute for Space Research. Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

(PhysOrg.com) -- Technicians from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., completed the installation of thermal blankets on NASA's Aquarius instrument last week, as the Aquarius/Satelite de Aplicaciones Cientificas (SAC-D) spacecraft continued functional performance tests at Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (Laboratório de Integracao e Testes – Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais, or LIT-INPE) in Sáo José dos Campos.

Activities are proceeding on schedule for shipment of the spacecraft to California's Vandenberg Air Force Base in late March for a launch in early June.

Aquarius/SAC-D is an international mission involving NASA and Argentina's space agency, Comisión Nacional de Actividades Espaciales. Aquarius, the primary instrument on the mission, was built jointly by JPL and NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Md. It will provide monthly global maps of how the concentration of dissolved salt (known as salinity) varies on the ocean surface. Salinity is a key tracer for understanding the ocean's role in Earth's water cycle and understanding ocean circulation.

By measuring ocean salinity from space, Aquarius will provide new insights into how the massive natural interplay of freshwater moving among the ocean, atmosphere and sea ice influences Earth's ocean circulation, weather and climate.

More information: For more information on Aquarius, visit: www.aquarius.nasa.gov

Provided by JPL/NASA