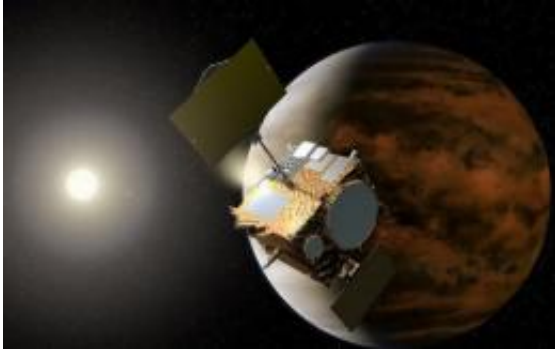


Japan test fires Venus probe engine

September 8 2011



This illustration created by Akihiko Ikeshita and received from Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) in December 2010, shows an artists impression of The Planet-C Venus Climate Orbiter, nicknamed "Akatsuki" or "Dawn", orbiting Venus.

Japan said it had successfully test-fired the engine of its "Akatsuki" space probe in preparation for a renewed attempt to get it into orbit around Venus in 2015.

Following December's failed attempt to send the probe to the second planet from the sun, a remote test ignition conducted Wednesday lasted for 2 seconds as planned, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said.

"The failure in December was highly likely due to engine damage," said JAXA spokesman Eijiro Namura.

"We have made the first step forward by igniting the engine for the first time since then," to assess its condition, he said.

The "Akatsuki", meaning "Dawn" is fitted with two paddle-shaped [solar panels](#) and blasted off in May last year on a 25.2 billion yen (\$300 million) mission to observe the toxic atmosphere and super-hot volcanic surface of Venus.

But in a setback for Japan's space programme, the box-shaped probe failed to enter the planet's [gravitational pull](#) and shot past it in December. It is still in space.

Another, longer engine test ignition of the probe -- officially known as the Planet-C Venus Climate Orbiter -- is planned for September 14.

Based on the test results, [JAXA](#) plans to fire up the engine in early November in order to adjust the craft's positioning ahead of the next available window for a Venus [orbit](#) attempt in 2015 or later, according to the agency.

Scientists believe that investigating the climate of Venus would deepen their understanding of the formation of the Earth's environment and its future.

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