

SETI scientists say it's time to send messages to ET

February 14 2015, by Nancy Owano



This is the "South Pillar" region of the star-forming region called the Carina Nebula. Like cracking open a watermelon and finding its seeds, the infrared telescope "busted open" this murky cloud to reveal star embryos tucked inside finger-like pillars of thick dust. Credit: NASA

Scientists want to contact extraterrestrial civilizations. Some applaud the effort. Others say this is not a good plan at all. The idea is for messages encoded in radio signals to be sent repeatedly for hundreds of years to planets in habitable zones around stars, said a report in *The Guardian*.

Repeated signals would be beamed at nearby planets that were chosen for their odds of harboring life. The scientists are from the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) Institute in California.

The BBC said that SETI's researchers have been listening for signals from outer space for more than 30 years using radio telescope facilities. So far there has been no sign. Writing in *ScienceInsider*, Eric Hand said, "Since the SETI movement began in the 1960s, it has mostly involved using radio telescopes to listen to [bands](#) in the electromagnetic spectrum for something out of the ordinary." Seth Shostak, director of the SETI Institute, believes that it is time to step up the search from listening to broadcasting. "Some of us at the institute are interested in 'active Seti', not just listening but broadcasting something to some nearby stars because maybe there is some chance that if you wake somebody up you'll get a response," he told BBC News. He proposed beaming the entire contents of the Internet, said *The Guardian*. Shostak communicated his views at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in San Jose on Thursday. Hand said scientists in both camps, for and against beaming, participated in the Thursday debate.

Among those against the idea in the past has been scientist Stephen Hawking. In 2010, *The Guardian* reported that Hawking believed we would be well-advised "to keep the volume down on our [intergalactic](#) chatter," according to Leo Hickman. Should earthlings draw attention to ourselves? Should we be yelling into space? Are we looking at a risk of aggression and even annihilation? *The Guardian* said Hawking had warned that "an encounter with more advanced ETs could go badly for humans." Ian Sample, science editor, *The Guardian*, said others agree. "Simon Conway Morris, an evolutionary paleobiologist at Cambridge, has urged governments to prepare for the worst because aliens might be as violent and greedy as [humans](#) – or worse." Shostak and others, meanwhile, posed their views in favor of beaming messages. According

to *The Guardian*, Douglas Vakoch, SETI Institute director of interstellar message composition, said, "We have already yelled 'Yoo Hoo!' We now want to follow up with something with a little more [substance](#)."

The BBC said the current plan was for leading astronomers, anthropologists and social scientists to gather at SETI after the AAAS meeting for a symposium. The Institute on the SETI website stated they recognize the need for further discussions. They said that "the topic of active transmissions towards potential extraterrestrial technological civilizations is not just a scientific matter, but also one with policy, diplomatic, regulatory, and cultural ramifications. It is a [topic](#) about which people have strong views, and a topic that needs to be discussed broadly."

David Brin, a scientist and science fiction writer spoke at the AAAS meeting. "[Historians](#) will tell you that first contact between industrial civilizations and indigenous people does not go well," Brin told Pallab Ghosh, science correspondent, BBC News.

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