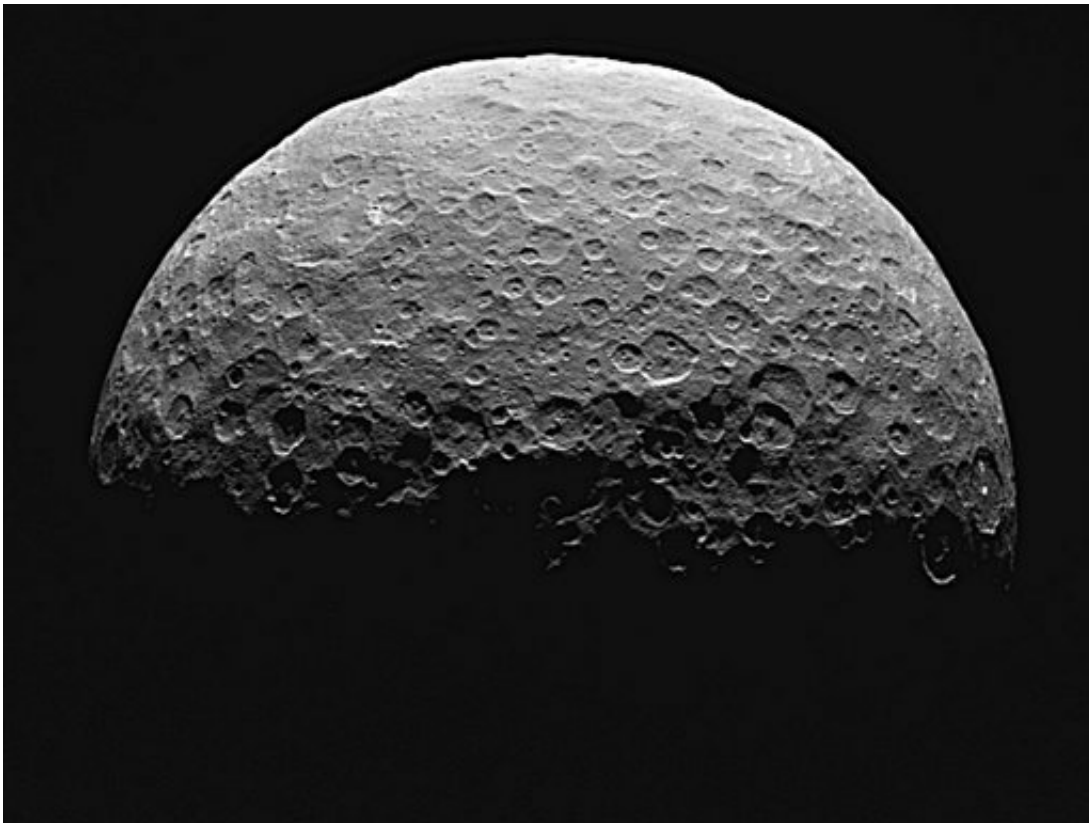


Start of dwarf planet mission delayed after small mix-up

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This photo from a sequence of images provided by NASA, taken from the Dawn spacecraft of Ceres, a dwarf planet located in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. NASA said the start of science observations was slightly delayed because of a communication glitch. The space agency said the delay won't affect the overall mission. (NASA via AP)

NASA said Friday observations of a dwarf planet have been delayed

slightly after a communication glitch.

The Dawn spacecraft circling dwarf planet Ceres was supposed to kick off its science campaign in the morning, but it didn't receive a command from ground controllers as expected.

Dawn briefly went into safe mode, suspending activities while in contact with Earth. This delayed the start of the mission until Friday night, said chief engineer Marc Rayman of the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Rayman called it an "inconvenience" that won't affect the overall mission.

Dawn slipped into orbit around Ceres last month after a nearly eight-year journey powered by ion propulsion engines. On Thursday, it settled into an orbit 8,400 miles (13,500 kilometers) above the surface of Ceres where it was to remain for several weeks before spiraling even closer.

The plan called for Dawn to photograph the ball of ice and rock and analyze the surface with its instruments. Dawn had been snapping pictures of Ceres before it entered orbit, but they were taken from far away.

Scientists hoped to get a better look at a pair of shiny spots located in a crater to determine what they are.

Ceres, the largest object in the [asteroid belt](#) between Mars and Jupiter, is Dawn's second stop. The spacecraft previously spent a year at the asteroid Vesta.

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