

Spacecraft circling Mercury will crash into planet April 30

April 16 2015, by Marcia Dunn



This artist's rendering provided by NASA shows the Mercury Surface, Space ENvironment, GEOchemistry, and Ranging (MESSENGER) spacecraft around Mercury. On Thursday, April 16, 2015, NASA announced that after years of orbiting the planet, the spacecraft will crash into the planet at the end of the month. (NASA/JHU APL/Carnegie Institution of Washington via AP)

After years of orbiting Mercury, NASA's Messenger spacecraft will crash into the planet at the end of this month.

NASA announced Messenger's impending demise Thursday. But instead of mourning, scientists and engineers celebrated the success of this first

spacecraft to orbit the planet closest to our sun.

Messenger is expected to slam into Mercury on April 30, succumbing to gravity after running out of fuel. It will be traveling more than 8,700 mph at the time of impact, and create a crater about 52 feet across. The impact will occur on the side of Mercury facing away from Earth, out of view of telescopes. Scientists expect to collect data until almost the bitter end.

Messenger was launched in 2004 and entered into Mercury's orbit in 2011.

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