

Worms survived shuttle crash

January 3 2006

NASA says tiny nematode worms that were aboard the space shuttle Columbia when it exploded were recovered alive in Texas.

Researchers say the survival of the nematodes suggests ways in which simple life forms might endure traumatic interplanetary journeys, The Washington Post reported.

The report, in a paper published in the journal *Astrobiology*, said a team led by NASA's Ames Research Center had placed six coffee-can-size aluminum canisters of nematodes aboard Columbia to monitor muscular atrophy during spaceflight.

NASA astrobiologist Catharine Conley said nematodes are useful in studying how prolonged spaceflight can affect the aging process in humans as well as human tolerance for cosmic ray exposure and muscular deterioration from weightlessness, the newspaper said.

When Columbia broke up the morning of Feb. 1, 2003, the nematode canisters plunged from the orbiter at speeds up to 650 mph and hit the ground with an impact 2,295 times the force of Earth's gravity.

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Citation: Worms survived shuttle crash (2006, January 3) retrieved 21 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-01-worms-survived-shuttle.html>

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