NASA SBIR 2006 Phase I Solicitation

X3.03  Crewed Spacecraft Environmental Monitoring and Control and Fire Protection Systems

Lead Center: JPL

Participating Center(s): GRC, JSC, KSC, MSFC

Environmental Monitoring and Control
Monitoring technologies are employed to assure that the chemical and microbial content of the air and water environment of the astronaut crew habitat falls within acceptable limits, and that the chemical or biological life support system is functioning properly. The sensors may also provide data to automated control systems. Technologies should be appropriate for a small crewed mission to the Moon, of duration no more than a few weeks. Emphasis is on major constituents in the air and lunar dust. Extendibility to trace monitoring for longer missions is a plus. Significant improvements are sought in miniaturization, accuracy, precision, and operational reliability, as well as long life, real-time multiple measurement functions, in-line operation, self-calibration, reduction of expendables, low energy consumption, and minimal operator time/maintenance for monitoring and controlling the life-support processes. Proposals should be for either new technologies or combine existing technologies in a new way to simultaneously monitor several major constituents and dust, and/or trace constituents.

- Substances from an external environment such as lunar surface dust may be encountered during astronaut excursions and may be a mechanical or chemical threat both during the external encounter and if brought inside. Monitoring technologies are needed to assess and quantify these threats.
- For longer missions, water monitoring will be required. Needs will include sensitive, fast response, online analytical sensors to monitor suspended liquid droplets, dispersed gas bubbles, and water quality, particularly total organic carbon.
- Monitoring of other species of interest include dissolved gases and ions, and polar organic compounds such as methanol, ethanol, isopropanol, butanol, and acetone in water reclamation processes; and particulate matter, major constituents (such as oxygen, carbon dioxide, and water vapor) and trace gas contaminants (such as ammonia, formaldehyde, ethylene) in air revitalization processes. Both invasive and noninvasive techniques will be considered.
- Monitoring of microbial species, especially pathogens, primarily in water, will be important for longer missions. Enabling technologies may include proper sample preparation and handling, with minimal operator effort and minimal or no reagent usage.
- Crew members will employ software tools to help them interpret sensor data. Methods are sought which will assist the crew in using sensor data to detect and predict failures.

Results of a Phase 1 contract should show feasibility of the technology and approach. A resulting Phase 2 contract should produce at least a prototype demonstration and test of the environmental monitor.

Spacecraft Fire Protection Systems
The objective of fire protection strategies on exploration spacecraft is to quantitatively reduce the likelihood of a fire and reduce the impact to the mission should a fire occur. NASA's fire protection strategy includes: strict control of
ignition sources and flammable material, early detection and annunciation of fire signatures, and effective fire suppression and response procedures. While proposals describing innovations in all of these areas are applicable, they are particularly sought in the following areas:

- Advanced fire detection strategies are desired that respond uniquely to one or more fire or pre-fire characteristics such as thermal radiation, smoke, or gaseous product. These sensors should be appropriate for the unique fire behavior in low- and partial-gravity environments yet effectively discriminate between fire signatures and relevant spacecraft nuisance sources. Fire detection systems particularly attractive for long-duration exploration missions will have reduced mass, power, and volume requirements and exhibit high degrees of reliability, minimal maintenance, and self-calibration.

- Fire suppression technologies for exploration spacecraft and habitats must be applicable for use in a confined habitable volume having an atmosphere of up to 34% O₂ by volume and pressures as low as 7.6 psia. These systems would be effective in low- and partial-gravity environments and have minimal mass and volume requirements. Applicable technologies would be highly reliable with little or no maintenance, have multi-use capability and/or be replenishable during a mission, and be compatible with the spacecraft environmental control and life support system.

Results of a Phase 1 contract should show feasibility of the technology and approach. A plan for the demonstration of a prototype to be developed in Phase 2 should also be produced at the end of Phase 1. The Phase 2 contract should produce at least a prototype demonstration and test of the fire detection or suppression system.