NASA SBIR 2007 Phase I Solicitation

X3.03 Spacecraft Cabin Environmental Monitoring and Control

Lead Center: JPL

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

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. A desire is for an immersible water quality sensor that is reversible; i.e., it tracks analyte changes in water without having to replace any sensor chemistry element.

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.