

U.S. Restarts Plutonium Production After Russian Supply Ends

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CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — The U.S. Department of Energy has produced its first batch of non-weapons grade plutonium, used to power space probes, since a nuclear reactor shutdown 25 years ago, NASA officials said Monday.

The U.S. space agency turned to buying radioactive plutonium-238 from Russia after safety issues prompted the Department of Energy to close its Savannah River Site in South Carolina in the late 1980s.

The Russian supply line ended in 2010, leaving NASA with a small and aged supply of plutonium for space probes flying missions that are ill-suited for solar power.

NASA has been flying nuclear-powered probes since the 1970s. Ongoing missions using such probes include the Mars rover Curiosity and the twin Voyager probes, which are leaving the solar system.

(Reuters)

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