

The Risks and Dangers of Space Exploration

The dangers of the '*unfriendly to humans*' space environment were introduced in the Section 2 notes. Besides those dangers, there are others. Accidents that may result in loss of life, economic setbacks and many years of work. There are tragedies that bring to life the true dangers of space travel, such as:

There have been three disasters and other near disasters, emphasizing how dangerous space travel is for astronauts. These disasters can occur, on the ground during training for a mission, during take-off, on the mission in space and during re-entry.

While Training - Apollo 1



3 astronauts died while training for the 1st Apollo mission. A fire broke out in their training capsule. Because there was no escape hatch, by the time the astronauts could be reached, they were dead.

During Launch - Challenger



A faulty O-ring on the booster rocket, carrying the Shuttle Challenger, caused the explosion during takeoff which took the lives of 7 astronauts.

In Space Mission - Apollo 13



An explosion on the exterior of the Apollo 13 capsule cut short the mission to the moon. The 3 astronauts aboard the capsule were able to use the LEM (Lunar Excursion Module) for life support until their successful re-entry.

Upon Re-entry - Columbia



The loss of some insulating panels on the Shuttle Columbia during launch was the cause of overheating and eventual disaster (explosion of the shuttle) during its re-entry, after a successful mission in space. 7 astronauts lost their lives

Other accidents or lost missions have occurred that have cost many millions of dollars and thousands of hours of work, including most recently, the European Rover on Mars – Beagle, that did not return any data, or signal, after it landed.

Sometimes decisions may have to be made that will ultimately determine if missions are to fail. Apollo 11's lunar (Moon) landing almost didn't occur, because the original landing site was found to be too rocky. With a precise amount of fuel, an alternate landing site had to be chosen on the first try, or the mission would be scrubbed.

The Dangers of Manned Space Travel

A launch can be affected by many dangers, including highly explosive fuel, poor weather, malfunctioning equipment, human error and even birds. Once in flight, the spacecraft can be affected by floating debris, meteoroids and electromagnetic radiation (coronal mass ejections – or, solar flares). Re-entering Earth's atmosphere also has its dangers (as proven by the Columbia disaster). The re-entry path the spacecraft takes must be perfect, otherwise, if it is too shallow - it will bounce off the atmosphere, and if it is too steep – it will burn-up.

Space Junk

Space junk refers to all the pieces of debris that have fallen off rockets, satellites, space shuttles and space stations that remain in space. This can include specks of paint, screws, bolts, nonworking satellites, antennas, tools and equipment that is discarded or lost.

The Hazards in Space

Over 4000 missions have been sent into space. **Micrometeorites** are constantly bombarding spacecraft and the International Space Station. They travel at extremely high velocity and can cause great damage. Once they enter the atmosphere, they usually burn up.

The Hazards on Earth

Some debris in space will enter the atmosphere and will not totally burn up. When this occurs, it may land in populated areas and cause loss of life or damage to property. Some satellites that reenter the atmosphere have radioactive parts and can contaminate a very large area costing a lot of money and hours to clean it up.

Issues Related to Space Exploration

Should we be spending billions of dollars to explore space or should it be used to fix the problems we have on the Earth?

The Pros and Cons Of Space Exploration

Disease, poverty, hunger, pollution and terrorism are all problems that face the people of the Earth. Spending billions to explore space, or spending billions to solve the conditions we currently experience is an ongoing debate that likely will never be solved. With depleting natural resources, population increases and advances in technology, the exploration of space may be the only option in the future.

The Potential Value Of Space's Resources

Resources in space mean economic wealth. Energy supplies appear to be unlimited – solar energy from the Sun and mineral resources from the Asteroid belt. The cost of travel in space could be cut substantially if fuel and construction material is readily available in space. The Moon is one of the first places scientists looked for resources where they were able to process hydrogen and oxygen from Moon rock. The oxygen could be used for life support and hydrogen for fuel on lunar bases. Combining the two, water can be produced.

Political, Ethical, and Environmental Issues

Political	Ethical	Environmental
Who owns space?	Is it right to spend so much on space, instead of fixing Earth's problems?	Who is responsible for protecting space environments from alteration?
Who can use the resources in space?	Do we have a right to alter materials in space to meet our needs?	Who is responsible for cleaning up space junk?
Who will determine what goes on in space?	How can we ensure that exploration will be used for good and not evil?	

Collaboration between nations with a **'space treaty'** may resolve some of these issues and pave the way to ensure that space exploration is orderly, meaningful and fair to all humans and all nations.

http://adc.gsfc.nasa.gov/adc/education/space_ex/issues.html

<http://www.spacelaw.com.au/content/issues.htm>

http://adc.gsfc.nasa.gov/adc/education/space_ex/essay1.html