

## NASA Principles and Policies on Scientific Openness

In February, I released an agency-wide message expressing my views on the issue of scientific openness and the role of public affairs within the agency. In that message I emphasized NASA's commitment to open scientific and technical inquiry and dialogue with the public. The message also stated that we would institute an effort to revise existing public affairs policies to correct any deficiencies, and to make sure they are fair, reasonable and easily understood. I am writing to you today to report on the results of this work.

I wish to thank the members of the working group who helped develop the set of principles and policies that will govern how we work with the news media to inform the public about our mission and research activities. This policy group, comprised of representatives from science, engineering, law, public affairs and management, did an exemplary job of addressing a broad range of issues in an effort to achieve our goal of openness in scientific and technical communications, while at the same time respecting the need to coordinate agency communications properly.

The resulting new policy, which will be available today on our Web site at <http://www.nasa.gov/commpolicy>, contains a statement of principles and revised policies that will enable better cooperation across our agency and more effective communication with the public. These principles are:

- A commitment to a culture of scientific and technical openness which values the free exchange of ideas, data and information. Scientific and technical information concerning agency programs and projects will be accurate and unfiltered.
- Consistent with NASA's statutory responsibility, providing for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information concerning NASA activities and their results.
- To ensure timely release of information, NASA will endeavor to ensure cooperation and coordination among the agency's scientific, engineering and public affairs communities.
- In keeping with the desire for a culture of openness, NASA employees may, consistent with this policy, speak to the press and the public about their work.

The policy provides several important provisions in support of the principles outlined above that I feel are worth further comment. First, it lays out clear guidelines for working with public affairs and unambiguously states what public affairs officers can and cannot do. Second, it guarantees that NASA scientists may communicate their conclusions to the media, but requires that they draw a distinction between professional conclusions and personal views that may go

beyond the scope of their specific technical work, or beyond the purview of the agency. Third, it sets forth a dispute resolution process to ensure that all parties have a route of appeal in communicating scientific and technical information. Lastly, it establishes clear areas of responsibility and methods of coordination which are intended to clarify and improve the communications process.

The principles and provisions of this revised policy will inform and guide NASA's public interactions. Realistically, not every scientific inquiry or engineering development will be deemed worthy of a press release, despite the sometimes strong opinions of the scientists or engineers involved in the work. Decisions concerning the newsworthiness of the numerous activities within NASA must be made and carried out in a coordinated fashion, but with views from all parties considered. This revised policy is an important step in that direction.

It is worth recalling that in the infancy of the space program, a difficult but very wise decision was made to allow live television coverage of our first Mercury launch, even though this left open the possibility of an embarrassing, even fatal, failure being broadcast to the world. On that day, the world watched with us as Alan Shepard was successfully launched on his, and our nation's first flight into space. NASA has remained true to this policy of open communication of both successes and failures ever since. We remain fully committed to that same standard today.

Michael Griffin  
NASA Administrator