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# NASA wants to crash into moon

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By John Kelly, Florida Today

NASA plans to smash a probe into the moon's south pole in a hunt for water. A lunar impactor will hitch a ride on the 2008 launch of the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter.

A bevy of water would make the polar region ideal for a lunar base because it could be used to make drinking water, breathing air and rocket propellant. That would be a huge money-saver for human missions because it means that much less cargo to launch, at \$10,000 a pound, off of the Earth.

The mission picked is called Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite, or L-Cross for short. The rocket's upper stage, the mass of an SUV, will dive bomb the L-Cross into the south pole. It will smash into the surface, making a crater 16 feet deep and about 100 feet wide.

The impact will send a plume of debris, containing material that was hidden beneath the surface, between 30 and 35 miles in the air. The spacecraft will have a follow-on measuring satellite that will fly through the plume to determine what's in the debris — similar to NASA's Deep Impact mission last July, which blasted into a comet. That craft will then make its own dive, creating a second crater.

In the 1990s, several robotic probes found elevated levels of hydrogen, a component of water, around the moon's poles, suggesting ice might lie beneath the frozen surface. But they failed to find vast expanses of it.

The 2008 mission won't be the first time NASA has crashed a robotic probe into the moon. In the 1960s, the space agency launched nine Ranger spacecraft on such a mission, but only three were successful, beaming back close-up pictures as they crashed. The 1999 orbiting Lunar Prospector collided into the moon, but it was considered a disappointment because it failed to kick up a cloud of debris.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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