



Wednesday, October 7, 2009 12:29:43 PM

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NASA to slam rocket into surface of the moon

Staff Reports
Posted: 10/07/2009 12:00:00 AM PDT

MOUNTAIN VIEW -- Before dawn Friday the moon will come under attack from space, but it's a science experiment, not an act of interstellar war.

According to NASA, at about 4:30 a.m. a 4,840-pound Centaur rocket will slam into the surface of the moon, releasing the equivalent of 10 billion watts of power on impact within the Cabeus crater, near the moon's south pole.

The impact will result in a "blinding flash of heat and light" as it launches a cloud of lunar material more than six miles into space, reports NASA.

Four minutes later the "Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite" will crash into the moon near the same spot.

Before being destroyed in its collision with the moon, the satellite will transmit photographs of the much larger rocket impact to earth. Then the spacecraft will fly through the debris cloud.

Onboard instruments will check the plume for signs of water, salts, clays, hydrated minerals and assorted organic molecules, says a statement issued by NASA.

"If there's water there, or anything else interesting, we'll find it," says Tony Colaprete of NASA Ames, the mission's principal investigator.

NASA predicts the brilliant flash and the associated sun-illuminated debris cloud will be easily visible with what it calls "mid-sized backyard telescopes — 10 inches and larger."

Space agency scientists are urging amateur astronomers to take pictures of the event and share them with NASA.

"The more eyes the better," says Brian Day of

NASA/Ames.

"Remember, we've never done this before. We're not 100 percent sure what will happen, and big surprises are possible.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for citizen scientists to join NASA in the process of discovery," says Day.

Skywatchers with photos they want to share with NASA can go to <http://apps.nasa.gov/lcross/observations/> on the Web and follow the directions to register and do uploads.

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