

26th SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE POLICY, REGULATIONS AND ECONOMICS (E3)
International Space Exploration Policies and Programmes (2)

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ISSUES IN DEVELOPING A RESPONSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL REGIME FOR CELESTIAL
BODIES

Abstract

As the diversity of both actors and activities in space expands, the structure and content of regulatory regimes and guidelines for the responsible exploration and use of solar system bodies must be adapted to suit new and future conditions. On 7 December 2012 the George Washington University Space Policy Institute collaborated with the COSPAR Panel on Exploration and the COSPAR Panel on Planetary Protection for an interdisciplinary workshop on these issues. Building on the outcomes of the workshop, this paper discusses the challenges of establishing guidelines and regulations for responsible planetary exploration as the nations of the world expand space exploration efforts and non-governmental entities also begin to invest in exploring resources on celestial bodies. Clear definitions of issues such as harmful contamination, the environment to be protected, and what levels of protection are to be considered reasonable, among others, must be determined. The incentives for adherence to guidelines must be reconsidered in light of new technologies and new stakeholders, and must encompass a wider gamut of activity including exploration, exploitation, scientific inquiry and protection. The traditional actors in space need to recognize the place of new commercial interests in space and incorporate them into the discussion of a regulatory regime. And the creation of an adapted set of guidelines must involve the recognition that flexibility will be very important to the success of a regime for responsible exploration. This paper will summarize the major issues and conditions that will need to be addressed, negotiated, and eventually resolved as the world moves into a new era of space exploration.