

52nd COLLOQUIUM ON THE LAW OF OUTER SPACE (E8)

Third party liability issues in commercial space activities (3)

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COLLISION COURSE: 2009 IRIDIUM-COSMOS CRASH

Abstract

On the 10th February, 2009, there was an orbit collision between an US Iridium satellite and Russian Cosmos satellite. The Iridium was operational while the Cosmos was already decommissioned. This event created a space debris cloud that will expand and merge with the pre-existing space debris. Several questions arise: Is there any reliable space debris data base accessible to manned space mission managers and satellite operators? How many space debris data centers are accessible to US private entities? Was the Iridium operator at fault while not making use of such information? Are the US and Russia at fault for increasing the threat to operational satellites and manned space missions by generating new space debris? This article will present facts, political positions and analyze this event under existing space law. It will also take a look at the evolving international standard of care for the mitigation of space debris. This standard of care will definitely set a new accent in liability matters in regard to the increasing space debris population of outer space.