NASA Awards Boeing Jupiter Icy Moons Orbiter Contract Extension

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) has extended a contract to a Boeing-led [NYSE: BA] team to study development of a deep space exploration vehicle for the proposed Jupiter Icy Moons Orbiter (JIMO) mission, scheduled to launch no earlier than 2011.

JIMO could be the first space science mission in NASA's Project Prometheus, the Nuclear Systems Program, part of the space agency's initiative to develop space nuclear power and electric propulsion technologies with the potential to revolutionize space exploration.

The space agency exercised an option, through July 2004, to provide an additional $5 million for further conceptual design activities. NASA had previously awarded Boeing and two other contractor teams $6 million for trade studies that ran through fall 2003.

The Boeing Phantom Works-led engineering team that includes Ball Aerospace & Technologies Corp. and BWX Technologies Inc., is studying technology options for the reactor, power conversion, electric propulsion and other subsystems of the JIMO spacecraft meant to explore the Jovian moons Ganymede, Callisto and Europa. NASA plans to select an industry prime contractor in fall 2004 to work with JPL to develop, launch and operate the spacecraft.

" We've been examining numerous combinations of technologies suitable for the JIMO spacecraft," said Dr. Joe Mills, Boeing JIMO vice president and program manager. "Before JIMO can be developed, we will find the best way to design and build a spacecraft that is safe to operate and capable of a long-duration mission to the Jovian moons."

The Boeing study team is supporting JPL in nuclear space power technologies and in integrating the knowledge with JPL's experience in high-power spacecraft systems and electric propulsion. These modern developments can bring the outer solar system within reach of more routine and in-depth scientific investigation.

The Boeing Company, with headquarters in Chicago, is the leading aerospace company in the world and the United States' leading exporter. The company has an extensive global reach, including customers in 145 countries, employees in more than 70 countries and operations in 38 U.S. states as well as Canada and Australia.

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