

International Heliophysical Year planning session completed

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUNSPOT, NM - The legacy of the planned International Heliophysical Year should be a lasting impact on scientific investigations for decades to come, according to more than 60 scientists from across the United States who met here last week, April 20-22, at the National Science Foundation's National Solar Observatory (NSO). The workshop was jointly sponsored by NASA and NSA.

"The International Geophysical Year, held in 1957-58, initiated a lot of efforts that went on for decades," said Nat Gopalswamy, a workshop co-convenor from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. "The IHY will help refocus efforts and lead to further developments over the next few decades."

The IHY will span 2007-08, the fiftieth anniversary of the IGY that produced an unprecedented level of understanding of geospace and saw the start of the Space Age. Like the IGY, the objective of the IHY is to discover the physical mechanisms that link the Earth to solar activities. Because of the short time frame, new science missions cannot be designed and built. However, Joseph M. Davila, also of NASA/Goddard, noted that, "The priority is in the science, not new hardware. We want to understand better how Earth responds to its environment, how Earth and Sun are related to each other. We are asking questions that are much broader than a single mission."

The investigations will cover basic physical process that occur in the heliosphere, which comprises all of space in the entire solar system outside the planets, from the surface of the Sun to where the solar wind meets the interstellar medium.

Davila said that workshop attendees agreed that a truly cooperative international program is needed in order to make measurements of the heliophysical phenomena from across the globe and from space. The attendees were eager to involve researchers from developing nations as equals. "We identified projects that are doable with international cooperation and that will lead to understanding basic physical processes in space," Gopalswamy added.

Several working groups were formed and will bring definitive plans forward to an international IHY meeting in France in 2005.

The NSO advances knowledge of the Sun, both as an astronomical object and as the dominant external influence on Earth, by providing forefront observational opportunities to the research community. NSO operates cutting-edge facilities, develops advanced instrumentation in-house and through partnerships, conducts solar research, and supports educational and public outreach. The Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy operates NSO under a cooperative agreement with the National Science Foundation, for the benefit of the astronomical community.

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Web links
Workshop
<http://www.nso.edu/general/workshops/ihy2004/>

Directions to Sunspot
<http://nsosp.nso.edu/pr/road-directions.html>

IHY
<http://ihy.gsfc.nasa.gov/>