

Re: Plutonium on Next Atlas V – Bad Idea?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.space.policy/2005-08/msg00846.html>

- *From:* Cardman <do-not@xxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Mon, 15 Aug 2005 11:11:25 GMT
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On 14 Aug 2005 20:00:08 -0700, "Ed Kyle" <edkyle99@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

>The next Atlas V will carry plutonium in RTGs on
>the Pluto New Horizons probe.

Should you care to calculate how large your solar panels have to be, out at Pluto's distance, then you will see that RTGs are the only real choice. Hopefully, they stuck in an extra RTG or two, when out past Pluto it would be going out a long way.

><http://www.spaceflightnow.com/atlas/av007/050814pluto.html>

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>[This will be the seventh Atlas V, but it will](#)
>[also be the *very first* Atlas V flown in the](#)
>["551" configuration, with five solid boosters](#)
>[and a five meter fairing.](#)

Well that is not uncommon, when they can swap the parts around as needed.

>[According to the](#)
>[report above, a recent environmental impact](#)
>[summary stated that the "mean probability of a](#)
>[plutonium release during the flight is about](#)
>[1 in 300".](#)

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>[Atlas V has had six successful launches, but](#)
>[only three have flown with solid motors, and](#)
>[there have been problems with the Atlas V solid](#)
>[motor development effort. One of the early solid](#)
>[motors failed during a ground test. I think I](#)
>[recall reading that Aerojet has had to certify a](#)
>[new "B" solid motor model to reduce acousitic](#)
>[loads.](#)

So they had an early design problem and have since fixed it.

>[No Atlas V has flown with more than three](#)
>[solids to date.](#)

Well this one is going to Pluto.

>This launch will have to be approved by President
>Bush. I suspect we will be hearing a *tiny* bit
>more about this in the coming months.

Yes, but not that much. Due to past launches the public now sees that
there is little risk here. And should this rocket like explode during
launch, then they can go and pick up all the pieces.

Also, since this is the one probe that NASA did not want to build, but
due to public (and scientific) protest, congress forced them to build
it anyway, then it would be an odd notion for the public to now
protest over the very hardware that they forced NASA to build.

You got it. You live with it.

Cardman.

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• **Follow-Ups:**

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• **References:**

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