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Scientists work on 3-D mapping of planets

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ROCHESTER, N.Y., May 19 (UPI) -- U.S. scientists say they're developing a technology to produce three-dimensional maps of various planets and moons.

Researchers at the Rochester Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology say such a system could provide robots, astronauts and engineers details about atmospheric composition, biohazards, wind speed and temperature -- information that could help land future spacecraft and more effectively navigate roving cameras across a Martian or lunar terrain.

Professors Donald Figer, Zoran Ninkov and Stefi Baum of RIT are working with MIT scientists Biran Aull and Robert Reich to develop a new type of detector that uses LIDAR -- Light Detection and Ranging -- a technique similar to radar, but which uses light instead of radio waves to measure distances.

The project is designed to deliver a new generation of optical/ultraviolet imaging LIDAR detectors that will significantly extend the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's capabilities for planetary applications. The detectors will provide 3-D location information for planetary surfaces and a wider range of coverage than the single-pixel detectors now combined with LIDAR.

The \$547,000 NASA-funded project also involves a potential \$589,000 phase for fabrication and testing.

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