

NEAR-EARTH ASTEROIDS BUZZ THE US GOVERNMENT (Maggie McKee)

Asteroids and comets that could fly dangerously close to Earth are getting attention from the US government.

A science committee in the US Congress passed a bill to provide 40 million USD to expand NASA's research for such objects. Former astronaut Russell Schweickart outlined a plan to land a transponder on an asteroid that has a small chance of hitting Earth in 2036.

The 40 million USD would be spent in 2006 and 2007 to detect, track, and study Near-Earth Objects (NEOs) larger than 100 metres across.

„Accounts of asteroids passing close to Earth with almost no prior warning should be enough to get our attention, „ says Congressman Dana Rohrabacher. The potential catastrophe of an asteroid hitting Earth should no longer be ignored. We need to know what is out there.“

Gareth Williams, at the Minor Planet Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, says the money could pay for more telescopes to scan the skies for threatening objects and to do more observations with the telescopes that already exist. He says some objects travel on extended orbits that stretch out to Jupiter or beyond, making them difficult to observe.

Other objects, such as the asteroid 2004 MN4 that has a small chance of hitting Earth in 2036, travel closer to the Sun. They spend much of their time within Earth's orbit, making observations challenging because of the glare of the Sun. It's possible that if an object is going to hit us, it's going to come to us from the Sun and we won't have seen it before. By increasing the amount of sky we can cover, we can detect more of these objects, he says.

Asteroid 2004 MN4 caused concern over Christmas in 2004 when early observations suggested it had a 1 in 38 chance of hitting Earth in 2029 – the highest risk ever identified.

1) Read the rest of the text. Use the word given in capitals to form a word that fits in the space. There is an example in 0.

Schweickart, on the board of a **foundation** that aims to
(1) Earth from NEOs, hopes to send
a robotic mission (2) about 300 million
USD to 2004 MN4 that would use a (3)
to radio the asteroid's (4) and surface
properties to Earth. He will (5) details of
his proposal at a(6) of the National Space
Society. Williams says Schweickart's (7)
is a good idea. „If we (8) the signal,
it will give us the position and velocity of the object,
which means we will get a massive (9)
in orbit (10)

FOUND
PROTECTION
COST
TRANSPOND
POSE
DISCUSSION
MEET
PROPOSE
OBSERVATION

IMPROVE
DETERMINE 10 b

2) Read the text and decide whether the sentences are true or false. If they are false, say what is true

a) US government has paid little attention to dangerous asteroids and comets. T/F

.....

b) Former astrophysicist Russell Schweickart suggested to destroy the dangerous asteroid. T/F

.....

c) Such asteroids should be ignored, Congressmen think. T/F

.....

d) More NEOs can be identified if we scan larger amount of the skies. T/F

.....

e) Asteroid 2004 MN4 is the most dangerous ever detected. T/F

.....

10 b

3) Ask about the underlined expressions

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

10 b

4) Answer the questions in your own words

a) What has drawn attention from the US government recently ?

.....

b) What is necessary to do in 2006 and 2007 ?

.....

c) Why is it difficult to identify some ENOs ?

.....

.....

d) Which ENO can be dangerous to Earth in near future ?

.....

e) What did Russell Schweickart suggest ?

.....

10 b

5) Write a summary of the whole text in Czech/Slovak in about 80 words.

10 b