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BU gets NASA contract

Boston Business Journal - 2:01 PM EDT Tuesday by [Brian Kladko](#) Boston Business Journal

Boston University will share in an eight-year, \$42.5 million contract from NASA to study the Earth's radiation belts.

The project will place several instruments into orbit on a pair of satellites. Those devices will measure the behavior of charged particles that cause space radiation, to gain a better understanding of the physical processes that control the shape and intensity of the ever-changing belts. The goal of the research is to help make space exploration safer for humans and satellites.

The mission, expected to launch in 2012, is part of NASA's Living with a Star program, which seeks more insight into the sun's behavior and its effect on the Earth and other planets.

BU will share the funding with researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Colorado at Boulder, Dartmouth College, the University of California-Los Angeles, the Aerospace Corporation, Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Southwest Research Institute. The principal investigator at BU is astronomy professor Harlan Spence.

High-energy electrons can penetrate spacecraft components, resulting in catastrophic electrical discharges. They can also alter the logic state of computer chips or degrade the efficiency of a satellite's solar cells. At high enough levels, they can penetrate thick layers of shielding and potentially damage human tissue.

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