



NASA to Test Laser "Broom" to Clean Space Junk

A LASER "broom" that will sweep space junk out of the path of the International Space Station will be tested on a space shuttle mission in 2003.

The high-tech broom, known as Project Orion, is designed to sweep up objects the size of tennis balls.

NASA scientists say that unless some of the debris is removed there is a 1 in 10 chance that the International Space Station will be holed during the next ten years.

Campbell's team has been measuring the forces that megawatt laser pulses can exert on debris of different types. He has shown that a laser broom could sweep away a piece of debris by locking onto it and slowing it down, deflecting it from the path of the space station.

"With a laser system we could clear from orbit all the debris between 1 and 10 centimetres in size within two years," says Campbell. The cost of such a clear-up would be \$200 million.

"The results are even more promising than we thought. We now know we can decelerate and de-orbit the debris with the types of laser that are available to us."