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CNES hosts Fourth International Workshop on Space Debris Modelling and Remediation

CNES organized the Fourth International Workshop on Space Debris Modelling and Remediation at its Head Office in Paris from Monday 6 to Wednesday 8 June, attended by 130 participants from 15 countries, including world experts in the field and representatives of space agencies, industry, science and academia, research laboratories and several start-ups.

The welcome addresses outlined the context in which efforts are being pursued to deal with the issue of space debris: “Orbital debris pose a growing threat to future space operations, chiefly in low Earth orbit. They have increased continuously in number and mass since the launch of Sputnik and have today become a nuisance, with in-orbit collisions having already occurred, avoidance manoeuvres that need to be performed every day, potentially dangerous debris re-entries reaching the ground and the occasional and unexplained loss of functionality on operating satellites.”

For all these reasons, CNES has been investing time and effort in space debris activities at national, European and international levels for the last 30 years. For example, the agency is contributing to the work of COPUOS’s Inter-Agency Space Debris Committee (IADC). It is also very active in drafting ISO standards directly applicable by the space industry.

Since 2006, CNES has been organizing three international workshops every two years, covering the main space debris issues: the European Satellites End of Life Operations Workshop, the International Conjunction Assessment Workshop and the International Space Debris Modelling and Remediation Workshop. During this latest two-and-a-half-day event, more than 60 speakers addressed all aspects about understanding how the debris population is evolving and identifying and assessing the many solutions envisioned for cleaning up space. Numerous orbital demonstrations planned in the years ahead were also detailed.

A number of historic figures took part in this workshop, notably Don Kessler, the first Director of NASA’s Orbital Debris Program Office, to whom we owe the eponymous Kessler syndrome. The syndrome describes the process by which the density of objects in low Earth orbit is high enough that collisions between them could cause a cascade, each collision generating more space debris that increases the likelihood of further collisions, with the implication that space activities and the use of satellites in certain orbits could ultimately become unfeasible.

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