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CNES SET FOR LIFTING OF LOCKDOWN MARS EXPLORATION SHIFTING INTO HIGHER GEAR THOMAS PESQUET'S NEXT MISSION

During the current lockdown, CNES has adapted its organization to protect the health of its workforce, play its part in the national effort to slow the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic and sustain the nation's economic activity.

To this end, the agency has transitioned to teleworking on a massive scale across its four field centres in Paris Les Halles, Paris Daumesnil, at the Toulouse Space Centre and at the Guiana Space Centre, thanks to the capacity of its information system and the huge efforts of staff.

However, CNES's response plan requires certain employees to be physically present on site and all steps have been taken to ensure they can carry out all of their tasks to the usual high standards of quality while strictly observing the recommended distancing and transmission reduction measures.

Mars exploration by CNES and its partners shifting into higher gear

For NASA's **Mars 2020 mission**, the Perseverance rover is in its final stages of integration at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. While following proper social-distancing measures, NASA's engineers are working full out to be ready for launch on 17 July. On the rover, the French-U.S. SuperCam instrument has come through a final series of tests run remotely from laboratories in France and the United States. Perseverance will look for signs of life on the red planet and collect rocks to be brought back to Earth in the 2030s by a NASA/ESA Mars sample return mission.

Meanwhile, the **Curiosity rover** on Mars since 6 August 2012 is still rolling, controlled from the FIMOC mission centre at the Toulouse Space Centre. A ten-strong team of CNES engineers and scientists are operating the French-U.S. ChemCam and SAM instruments alternately with U.S. laboratories, firing ChemCam's laser to sublime rocks while working from home. The project has transitioned to conducting operations remotely and the new organization is functioning safely and well. Curiosity is now exploring clay-bearing layers on the sides of Mount Sharp, in the middle of Gale Crater where it has been for nearly eight years. It has already driven 22 kilometres and confirmed that Mars was a habitable planet for micro-organisms around 3.5 billion years ago.

There is also good news from the **SEIS seismometer**. NASA's InSight lander is still listening to Mars, as engineering and science teams from the SISMOC mission operations centre establish the French instrument's work plan from home. SEIS was developed by an international team led by CNES. It has already detected the first tremors on Mars, which are slowly but surely revealing its interior structure.

Future missions are also in preparation, with CNES's engineers are working remotely on the development of ESA's **ExoMars** mission scheduled to launch in 2022, and on JAXA's **MMX** mission to return samples from the moon Phobos, scheduled to depart in 2024.

Naming Thomas Pesquet's next mission

In partnership with CNES, ESA has launched a competition to find the name of Thomas Pesquet's next mission to the International Space Station (ISS) scheduled to depart in 2021. To take part, go [here](#). The

closing date for entries is midnight on 12 May. The winner will receive a signed mission patch that will have flown on the ISS.

CNES contributes to experiments aboard the ISS chiefly through the CADMOS centre for the development of microgravity applications and space operations, which is currently working on experiments for Thomas's next mission. Based at the agency's Toulouse Space Centre, CADMOS defines, develops and operates microgravity experiments, for which it calls on a range of ground facilities including laboratories, ground models, control centres and networks dedicated to scientific programmes being conducted on behalf of CNES or delegated to it by ESA. It draws on its extensive expertise to devise experiment protocols, train crews and review and return data to the experiments' investigators.

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