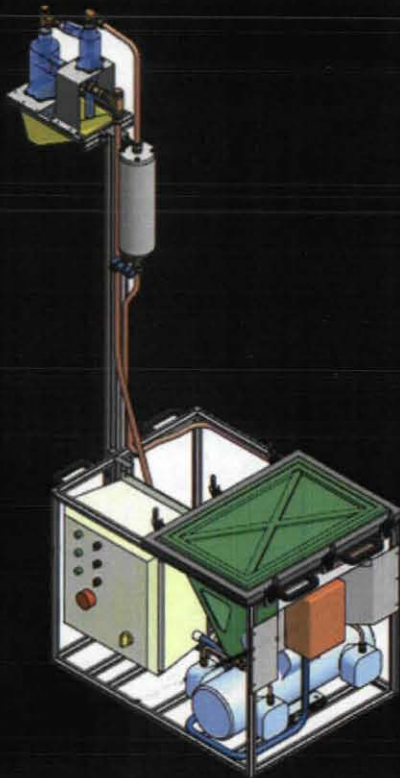


Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

R.P. Mueller (NASA KSC), I.I. Townsend (ASRC), J.G. Mantovani (NASA KSC), Kris
A. Zacny and Jack Craft



Presented by Van Townsend,
NASA Kennedy Space Center, Florida USA



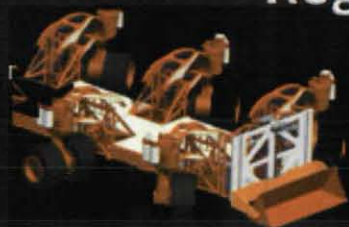
AMS 2010
May 12-14, 2010
Orlando, Florida

Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

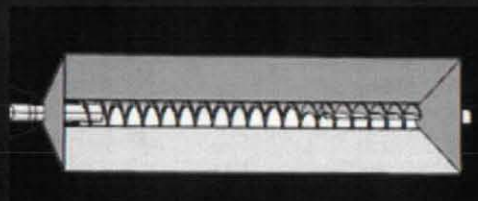
R.P. Mueller (NASA KSC), I.I. Townsend (ASRC), and J.G. Mantovani (NASA KSC)



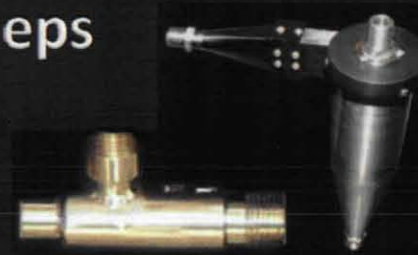
Regolith Transfer and ISRU Processing Steps



Excavator Delivers
Regolith to Trough



Regolith is
Transferred to the
Pneumatic Transfer
System's Supply Bin



Regolith is Conveyed
Pneumatically to an
ISRU Reactor



Spent Regolith is
Pneumatically Conveyed
Out of the ISRU Reactor



Regolith is Chemically
Reacted to Yield Useful
Products Like Oxygen and
Metals such as Titanium

E.g., Carbothermal,
Hydrogen Reduction,
Molten Oxide Electrolysis



Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

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Possible Regolith Feed Systems

Pneumatic Transport

Pros

- + Compact
- + Versatile - easily reconfigurable to fit other systems
- + Low temperature valves
- + Improved performance in 1/6 g
- + System commonality – reuse of ISRU fluidization components

Cons

- Complexity
- Additional Cooling
- Sandblasting
- Size Sorting
- Compressor required if not already available

Inclined Auger

Pros

- + Simple
- + Previous experience
- + Sprawl (good for spent pile)

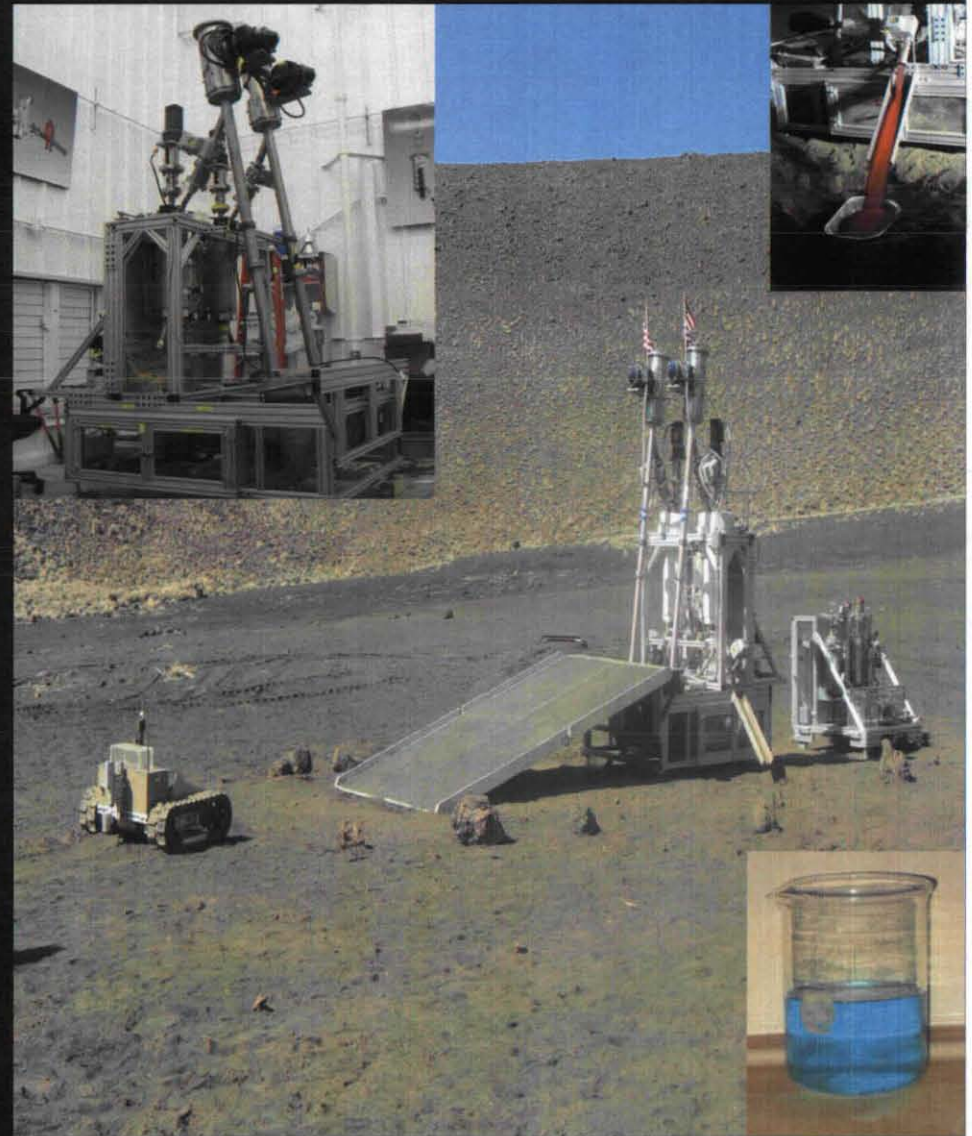
Cons

- Wear concerns
- Sprawl (bad for volume and deployment concerns)
- Dump pile interference

ROxygen Testing

Successfully Assembled and Tested ROxygen System:

- Successfully Assembled and Tested the subsystem at JSC to qualify for the OPTIMA Field Test
- Assembled the complete system in Hilo for the OPTIMA Field Test
- Successfully performed reductions to achieve our goal of producing water from dry native soil then separated that water into hydrogen and



ROxygen

ROxygen Testing

Valves that are compatible with the flow of granular materials. Figure: Spherical Disc Valve from Gemco, Inc



ROxygen Testing

Figure: Hot Tephra flowing out of Gemco valve attached to the bottom of the ROxygen I Reactor.

.Show Movie



ROxygen Testing

Figure: Flight experiment in May 2008 to test the flow of regolith simulant inside a hopper under reduced gravity conditions.



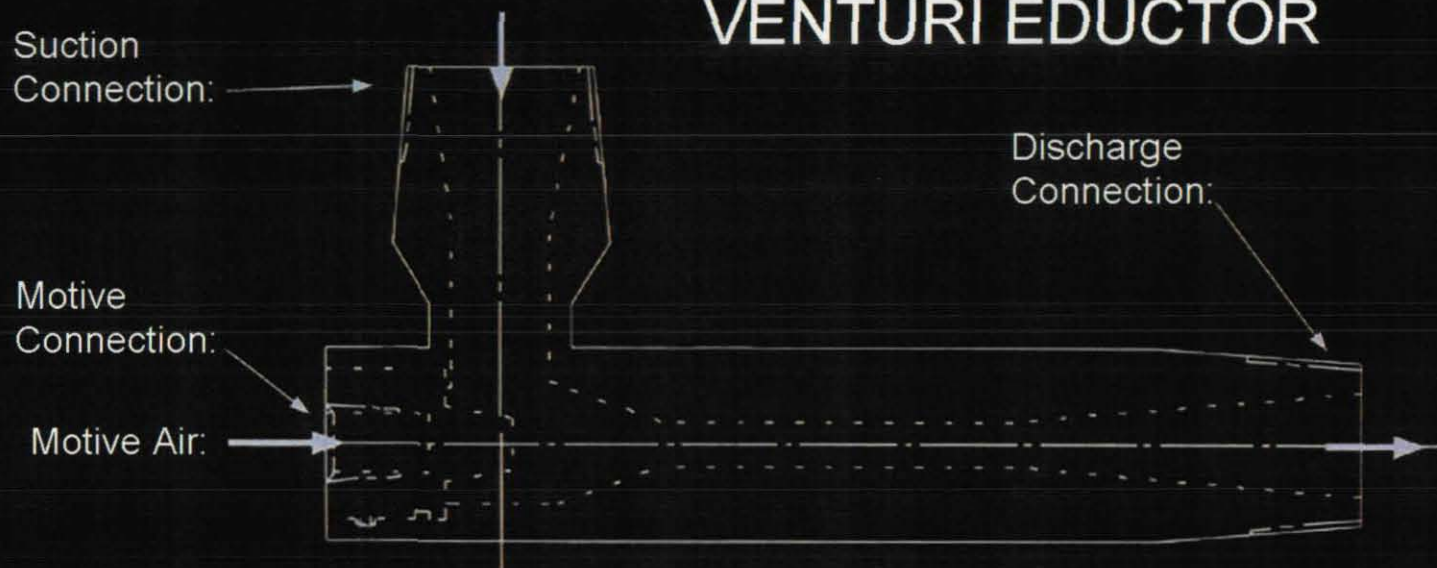
ROxygen



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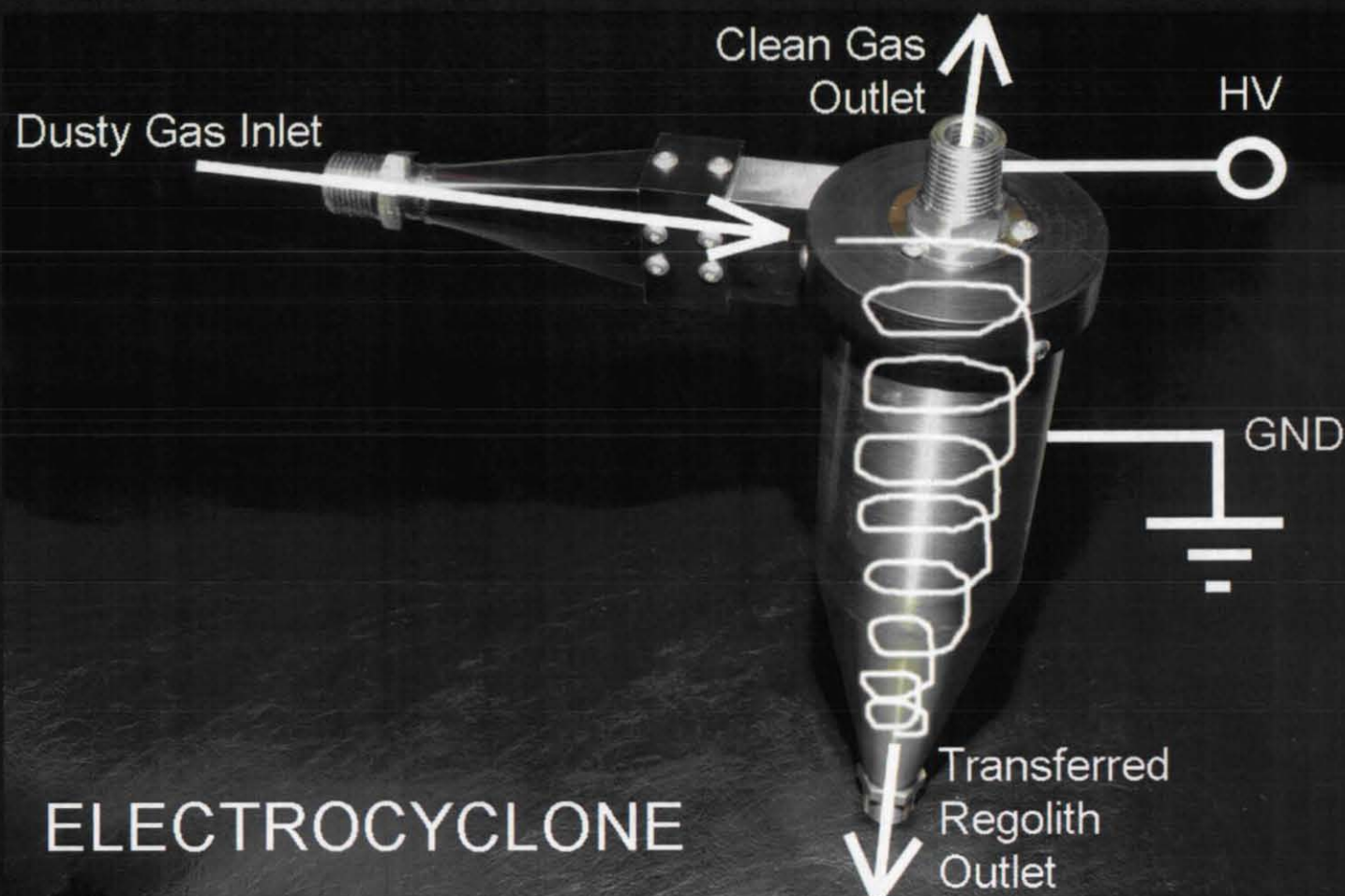
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Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

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Reduced Gravity Flight Experiment to Evaluate the Pneumatic Regolith Transfer System at $1/6$ g and to Compare with Results at 1 g



Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

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Pneumatic Regolith Transfer System for 1 g and 1/6 g



HEPA Filters for Exhaust Air from Electrocyclone

Cyclone/Electrocyclone Gas-Particle Separator

Secondary Containment Enclosure w/Hinged Door (Total Weight: 195 kg)

Regolith Supply Partially Hidden in Back (17kg of NU-LHT-2M)

Receiving Bin (Empty) Serving as an ISRU Reactor Mockup

Venturi Eductor (hidden) attached to Supply Bin for Gas-Solids Mixing

High Voltage DC Power Supply for Electrocyclone

Gas Supply (from Reg. Compressed Air Bottle)



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The NASA KSC Reduced Gravity Flight Experiment was supported by the NASA Innovative Partnership Program and flow from the JSC Reduced Gravity Office at Ellington Field in Houston

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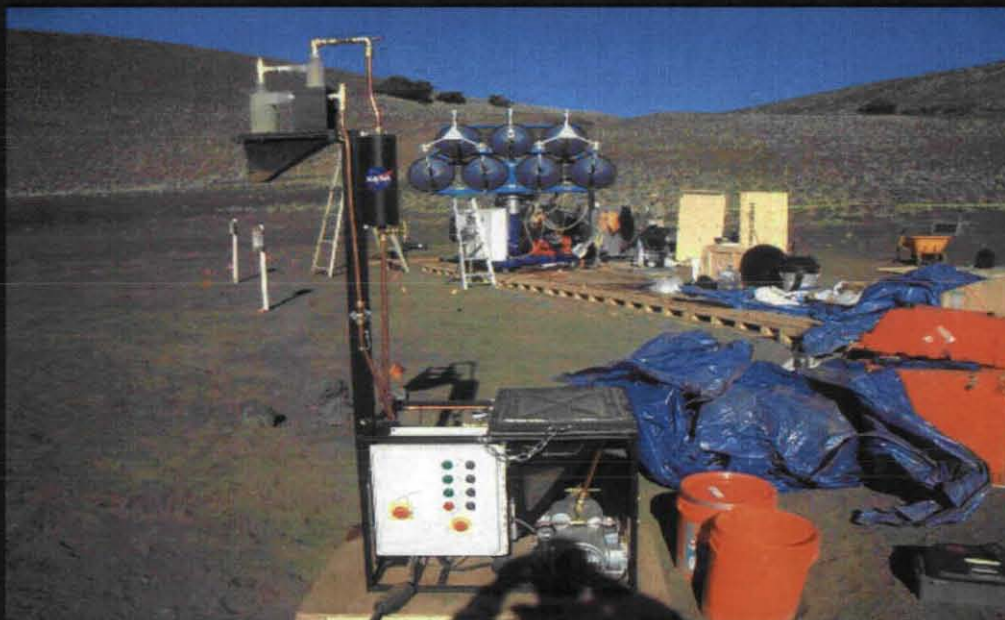
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Figure: Pneumatic Regolith Feed System for the Carbothermal O₂ reactor at the Mauna Kea field test in February 2010. *Pneumatic system tested in Feb 2010 at Mauna Kea.*

Find a better picture and insert video

Get Rover delivering material



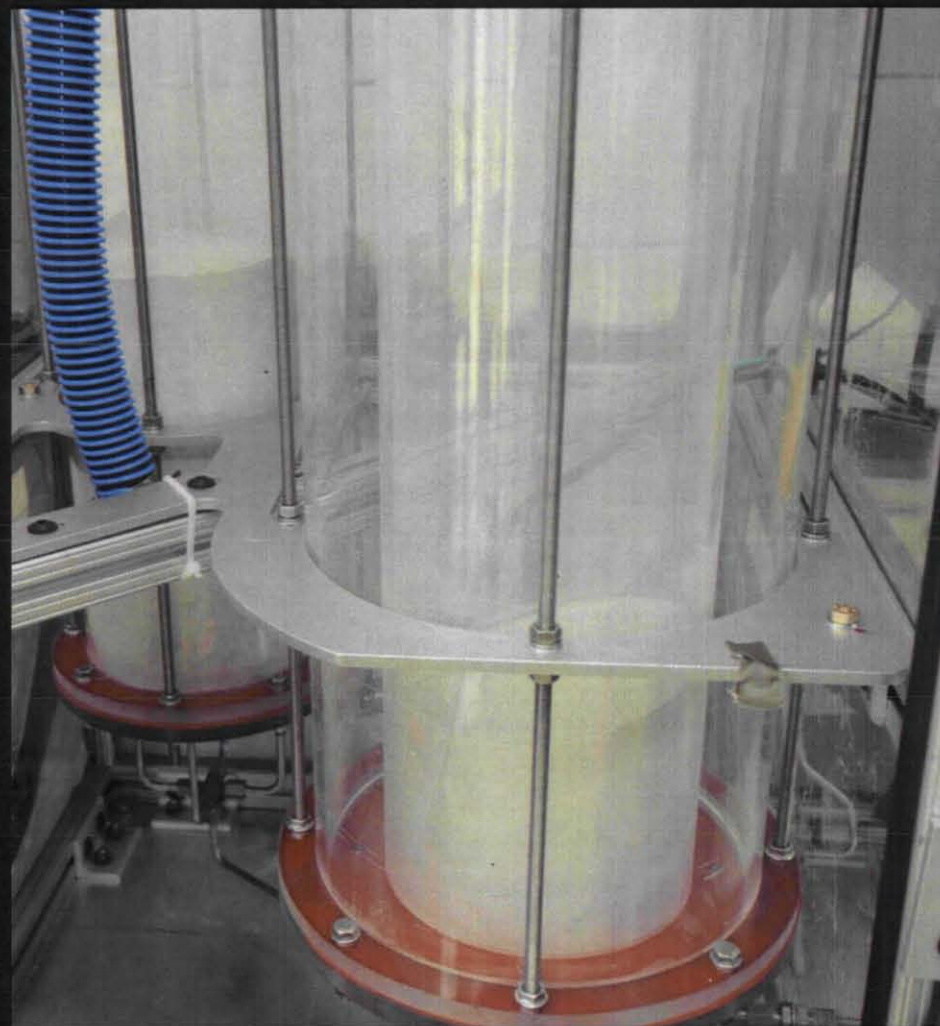


Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

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RESULTS

- Tephra (16.5kg) transferred well in 1 g
- Tephra (16.5kg) transferred better in 1/6 g
- NU-LHT-2M transferred well in 1 g. Sieved (1.4 mm) 12.5 kg was transferred in ~3 min in 1g.
- NU-LHT-2M (8.8kg) transferred better in 1/6 g (rocks in unsieved sample plugged the eductor that halted regolith transfer)
- Fluidization was evident
- Eductor formed a hole that collapsed as a result of fluidization
- Cyclones were overwhelmed by simulant flow (electrocyclone needs a dilute flow)
- Cyclones to be re-designed for dense flow



1 g and 1/6 g Testing of Pneumatically Conveyed Lunar Regolith Simulants

Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

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Conclusions

- ✓ Pneumatic regolith transfer was successfully demonstrated at 1 g and at 1/6 g.
- ✓ It is possible to pneumatically convey a dense flow of the lunar regolith simulants NU-LHT-2M and Tephra to a vertical height of 1.52 meters (limited by the aircraft).
- ✓ Since the RGF experiment hardware experiences periods of increased gravity (~ 1.8 g), this likely compacts the granular regolith simulant material.
- ✓ Turning off the flow of dusty gas between parabolas resulted in inefficient cyclone performance, and likely contributed to the cyclones being overwhelmed by the dust flow during the RGF experiment.



Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

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Conclusions

- ✓ Cyclone separators are essential to a closed-loop pneumatic regolith transfer system in which the gas must be reused.
- ✓ Reduced gravity flight experiments and ground tests demonstrated that lunar regolith simulant is very easily conveyed pneumatically into a simulated ISRU oxygen production plant reactor, and that the regolith can be fluidized within the hopper feed system. The ground testing demonstrated that regolith can also be expelled from the ISRU reactor for disposal (or possibly for later resource processing, e.g., to extract silica, aluminum, titanium, iron, etc.).

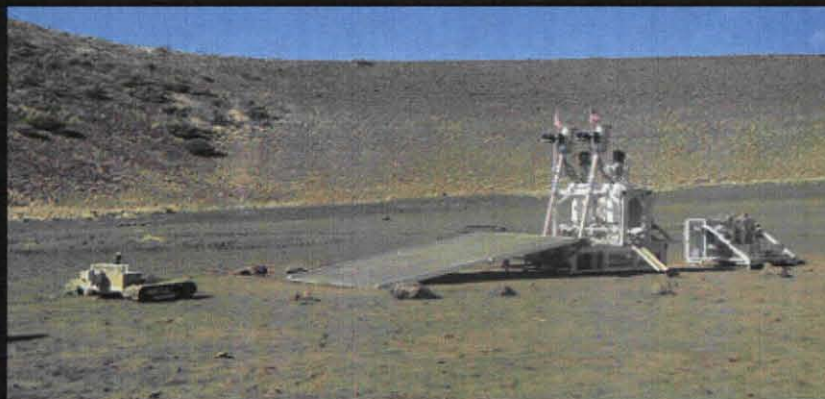


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Future Work and Integration Plans

- ✓ Metering the regolith feed will make it possible to test the electrocyclone by producing a moderate dense flow of dusty gas that yields a sufficient mass transfer rate while lessening the burden on the cyclones to filter the exhausted gas.
- ✓ The results of these experiments influenced the design of the regolith feed systems of the ROxygen second generation oxygen production system being developed by the NASA ISRU project, as well as the Carbothermal oxygen production plant, which was recently field tested on Mauna Kea.



The ROxygen 1 Field Test used an Auger Regolith Feed System. ROx 2 design uses the Pneumatic Regolith Feed System.

Pneumatic Regolith Transfer Systems for In Situ Resource Utilization

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and the KSC Surface Systems Office (NE-S).

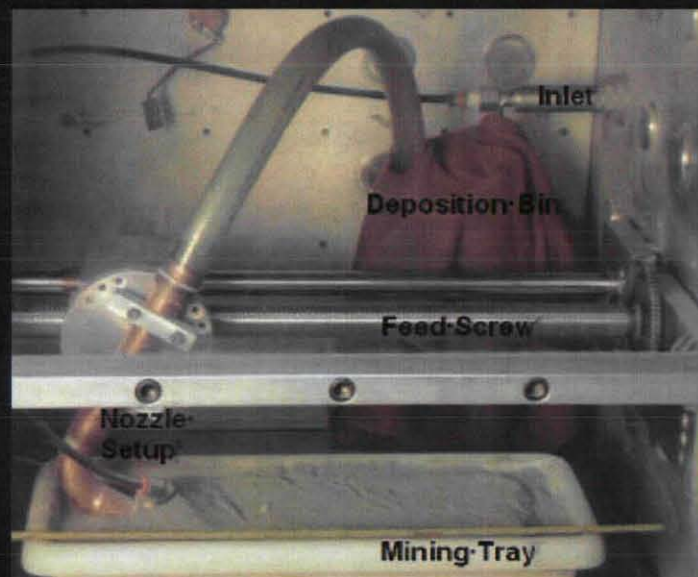
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Acknowledgments

Figure: Jet-Lift Regolith Transfer



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Pneumatic system tested in Feb 2010 at Mauna Kea.

Find a better picture and insert video



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