Nanocarpets — that is, carpets of carbon nanotubes — are undergoing development as means of trapping microscopic particles for scientific analysis. Examples of such particles include inorganic particles, pollen, bacteria, and spores. Nanocarpets can be characterized as scaled-down versions of ordinary macroscopic floor carpets, which trap dust and other particulate matter, albeit not purposefully. Nanocarpets can also be characterized as mimicking both the structure and the particle-trapping behavior of ciliated lung epithelia, the carbon nanotubes being analogous to cilia (see figure).

Carbon nanotubes can easily be chemically functionalized for selective trapping of specific particles of interest. One could, alternatively, use such other three-dimensionally-structured materials as aerogels and activated carbon for the purposeful trapping of microscopic particles. However, nanocarpets offer important advantages over these alternative materials:

- Nanocarpets are amenable to noninvasive probing by optical means; and
- Nanocarpets offer greater surface-to-volume ratios.

This work was done by Flavio Noca, Fei Chen, Brian Hunt, Michael Bronikowski, Michael Hoenk, Robert Kowalczyk, and Daniel Choi of Caltech for NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Further information is contained in a TSP (see page 1).

In accordance with Public Law 96-517, the contractor has elected to retain title to this invention. Inquiries concerning rights for its commercial use should be addressed to: Innovative Technology Assets Management JPL

Mail Stop 202-233
4800 Oak Grove Drive
Pasadena, CA 91109-8099
(818) 354-2240
E-mail: iaoffice@jpl.nasa.gov

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