Space Technology Mission Directorate
Game Changing Development Program

Nuclear Systems Kilopower Overview

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www.nasa.gov/directorates/spacetech/game_changing_development
**Kilopower Technology Demonstration – Overall Objectives & Elements**

**• Innovation:**
- A compact, low cost, scalable fission power system for science and exploration
- Novel integration of available U235 fuel form, passive sodium heat pipes, and flight-ready Stirling convertors

**• Impact:**
- Provides Modular Option for HEOMD Mars Surface Missions
- Bridges the gap between Radioisotope Power Systems (RPS) and 40 kW_e class fission power technology
- Enables SMD Decadal Survey Missions
- Reduces NASA dependence on Pu238

**• Goals:**
- Nuclear-heated system-level test of prototype U235 reactor core coupled to flight-like Stirling convertors
- Detailed design concept that verifies scalability to 10 kW_e for Mars

**1 to 10 kW_e Kilopower Technology**

*Full-scale nuclear test of reactor core, sodium heat pipes, and Stirling convertors at prototypic operating conditions*
Why Kilopower?

• The Kilopower technology demonstration is the practical and affordable first step to getting a reactor power system in space
  - Executing nuclear testing in existing DOE facilities is crucial to affordable technology development and demonstration
    - Small physical size of hardware and low power level allows use of existing facility within current regulatory authority
  - The reactor core can be fabricated and shipped with existing assets
  - The same equipment used to test pre-nuclear prototypes can be transported to the DOE facility and used in the nuclear test
  - *Keeping it small means keeping it affordable*

• Kilopower enables larger power systems and nuclear propulsion
  - The path from technology maturation to flight qualification of a larger power system will not be trivial; smaller and simpler is better
  - Qualification and programmatic risks will be substantially retired so that larger reactor systems requiring more fuel and engineering complexity can be developed
Kilopower-Enabled Concepts Family

- **Common Design Features include:**
  - 0.5 to 10 kWe; >10 year design life
  - Utilize available UMo reactor fuel from DOE
  - Minimize thermal power to simplify reactor design and control
  - Incorporate passive Na heat pipes for reactor heat transport
  - Leverage power conversion technologies from RPS Program (TE, Stirling)
  - Design system so that it can be tested in existing DOE nuclear facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Power (W)</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Weight (kg)</th>
<th>Density (W/kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 kW Thermoelectric</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 W Stirling</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 kW Stirling</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 kW Stirling</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 kWe-class Technology Demonstration establishes foundation for range of systems and capabilities.
## Approved Kilopower Project Plan by Element

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>FY15</th>
<th>FY16</th>
<th>FY17</th>
<th>FY18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kilopower Prototype Test</strong></td>
<td>Finalize system design and assemble components</td>
<td>Perform non-nuclear system verification test at GRC</td>
<td>Install reactor core and perform nuclear test at Nevada Nuclear Security Site</td>
<td>Initiate modifications for Mars surface power 10 kW_e technology demo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mars Kilopower System Concept and Scalability from Prototype</strong></td>
<td>Develop 10 kW_e-class power system concept for Mars surface missions</td>
<td>Mars Kilopower detailed conceptual design</td>
<td>Demonstrate in-core heat pipe heat transfer, determine power conversion adaptation scope, and deliver system technology demonstration plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kilowatt Reactor Using Stirling Technology (KRUSTy)

- Verify system-level performance of flight-like U-Mo reactor core, sodium heat pipes, and Stirling power conversion at prototypic operating conditions (temperature, heat flux, power) in vacuum
- Establish technical foundation for 1 to 10 kWe-class fission power systems
• Kilopower Thermal Prototype is first of three steps to a nuclear ground demonstration
  ▪ Non-nuclear functional prototype with steel simulated reactor core
  ▪ Non-nuclear prototype with depleted uranium simulated core
  ▪ Nuclear demonstration with uranium reactor core

• Thermal prototype validates core geometry and heat pipe attachment method prior to build of depleted uranium simulated core
  ▪ Steel core thermal properties are close enough to uranium to validate heat pipe attachment method under thermal load, and segmentation of core
  ▪ First of two electrically heated trials of heat pipe attachment methods tested at temperature in vacuum
Latest Configuration of 1 kW\textsubscript{e} Krusty Nuclear Demonstration
SMD Mission Pull for Small Fission

- Small fission technology enables expanded science and new Decadal Survey missions (examples below)
- **Potential benefits to SMD include:**
  - Orbiters instead of flybys, landers instead of orbiters, multiple targets
  - More instruments, bigger instruments, increased duty cycles
  - High rate communications, real time tele-operations, in-situ data analysis
  - Electric propulsion, lower launch mass, greater mission flexibility

### Mission Examples

- **Jupiter Europa Orbiter ~600 We**
  - 6 MMRTGs
  - 4 ASRGs
  - 1 Small Fission System

- **Neptune Systems Explorer ~3 kWe**
  - 28 MMRTGs
  - 6 Large SRGs
  - 1 Small Fission System

- **Kuiper Belt Object Orbiter ~4 kWe**
  - 36 MMRTGs
  - 8 Large SRGs
  - 1 Small Fission System

- **Trojan Tour ~800 W**
  - 8 MMRTGs
  - 6 ASRGs
  - 1 Small Fission System
The Evolvable Mars Campaign has found that Kilopower systems can be used in multiples to address human surface missions as an alternative to a large single power plant:

- Smaller unit size and mass permits easier packaging in surface landers
- Multiple units provide a greater level of redundancy and fault tolerance
- Units can be deployed as needed in timeline for flexibility in buildup approach
- Human missions can benefit from first user’s establishment of nuclear infrastructure (material handling, testing, safeguards) and launch approval process
HAT Study: Fission Surface Power 40 kW_e System vs. Kilopower

Mars surface mission needs ~40 kW of surface power

...but it doesn’t necessarily have to be in a single package

“Kilopower” design is similar to the FSP, but with lower mass, less volume, easier logistics, and fewer moving parts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Power (kWe)</th>
<th>Mass (kg)</th>
<th>Dimensions (m)</th>
<th>Radiators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dia</td>
<td>Height</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,011</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,246</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,544</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSP</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>7 m tall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>7 m tall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DRA5 Baseline
1 x 40kWe

2 x 20kWe

4 x 10kWe

7 x 5 kWe

Etc.
Partner Organizations Investing in Kilopower

- **DOE/National Nuclear Security Administration**
  - Nevada Nuclear Security Site Device Assembly Facility is being provided without cost to NASA
  - NNSA will own, keep, and dispose of Kilopower demonstration reactor core
  - *NNSA is a funding partner in FY16 & 17 to Kilopower*

- **HEOMD**
  - Kilopower is the assumed surface power technology for Evolvable Mars Campaign architecture trades
  - Providing time of Human Spaceflight Architecture Team (HAT) members for Mars Kilopower Concept Development
  - Possible Kilopower use on 2024-26 Mars In Situ Resource Utilization Surface Demo

- **Other Government Agencies: ARPA-E**
  - Contracts awarded for 1 kWe residential power: GENerators for Small Electrical and Thermal Systems (GENSETS)
  - Two Stirling technology contracts could have direct benefit to Kilopower (Infinia, Sunpower)
Extensive Project Leveraging

- Existing NNSA nuclear test facilities operated within current safety constraints
- Available high-enrichment U235 fuel and other nuclear materials from Y-12
- Existing, benchmarked LANL reactor design codes
- Four SBIRs producing plug-in ready test hardware
  - Phase II contracts for Na heat pipes, radiators, and alternate (Brayton) power conversion
  - Phase IIE in negotiation for Na heat pipes to be used in nuclear test at NNSS
- Existing Advanced Stirling Convertors and design expertise from RPS Program
- Stirling cold-end heat pipes from Flight Opportunities Program & RPS
- Extensive MSFC experience-base in reactor thermal simulators and custom electric resistance heaters

Existing facilities, expertise, and equipment provide a uniquely timed level of affordability

Device Assembly Facility (DAF)
Nevada Nuclear Security Site (NNSS)

Advanced Stirling Convertor (ASC)
From ASRG Project
Cross-cutting Experience Gained Through 1 kW<sub>e</sub> Test

- Experience gained and infrastructure established during the 1 kW<sub>e</sub> test will reduce risk of any future reactor development
  - Common nuclear fuel form that is scalable to 10 kWe
  - Fabrication of reactor core to NASA specifications
  - Shipping and handling of reactor core in specialized cask
  - NNSS familiarization with NASA test practices
  - NASA familiarization with NNSS nuclear safety & contingencies
  - Reactor assembly with combination of NNSS and NASA personnel
  - Reliable instrumentation, data acquisition, and data storage
  - Reactor operator experience for startup, steady-state, transient, & shutdown
  - Reactor cool down, disassembly, and core disposal

These capabilities translate across a wide range of space nuclear applications and power levels
Stirling Industry Base Supports Full Range of Kilopower Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sunpower EE-35</th>
<th>Infinia TDC</th>
<th>Sunpower ASC</th>
<th>Sunpower P2A</th>
<th>Qnergy QB-3500</th>
<th>Sunpower PCU</th>
<th>Qnergy QB-7500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nominal</strong></td>
<td>35 W</td>
<td>55 W</td>
<td>80 W</td>
<td>1 kW</td>
<td>3.5 kW</td>
<td>6 kW</td>
<td>7.5 kW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>20 - 42 W</td>
<td>50 - 60 W</td>
<td>60 - 90 W</td>
<td>0.5 - 1.4 kW</td>
<td>4.5 - 7.2 kW</td>
<td>Qnergy I.P.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thot</strong></td>
<td>650 °C</td>
<td>650 °C</td>
<td>760 °C</td>
<td>550 °C</td>
<td>575 °C</td>
<td>100 °C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tcold</strong></td>
<td>80 °C</td>
<td>120 °C</td>
<td>90 °C</td>
<td>50 °C</td>
<td>60 °C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td>105 hz</td>
<td>80 hz</td>
<td>102 hz</td>
<td>50 hz</td>
<td>60 hz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Piston Amp.</strong></td>
<td>4 mm</td>
<td>5.6 mm</td>
<td>4.5 mm</td>
<td>10 mm</td>
<td>16 mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approx. Mass</strong></td>
<td>1.4 kg</td>
<td>4.5 kg</td>
<td>2.5 kg</td>
<td>35 kg</td>
<td>67 kg</td>
<td>100 kg</td>
<td>103 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bearings</strong></td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>Flexure</td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>Flexure</td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>Flexure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td>6 units built for GRC</td>
<td>16 units built, 4 remain on test at GRC</td>
<td>29 units built for GRC, 13 on test at GRC</td>
<td>&gt;10,000 units built by Microgen for CHP</td>
<td>430 solar Powerdish units on field trial at Tooele</td>
<td>2 units built at SP for GRC TDU</td>
<td>&gt;100 production units built for CHP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 kWₑ Kilopower Test Retires Many Challenges for 10 kWₑ Fission Systems

- New test stand at NNSS
- Internal heat pipe channels
- 24 brazed or liquid-metal bonded heat pipes
- Shared HP-to-Stirling thermal bus
- Larger, commercial-adapted Stirling units

TRL 5 for 1 kWₑ

• Prototypic reactor core
• Material properties & compatibility
• UMo fuel casting, machining & inspection
• BeO reflector material & configuration
• Facility controlled reactivity insertion/removal
• Reactivity feedback control
• System performance – start, run, stop, restart
• Nuclear test safety and contingencies
• Nuclear performance code validation

Common Elements

TRL 5 for 10 kWₑ

Greater complexity

Wait for more specific Mission reqmts

- Fuel irradiation studies
- Prototypic reactor control
- Prototypic radiation shielding
- End-to-end system
- Environmental testing
- Nuclear launch safety

TRL 6
Summary

• We have the team

• We have available, leveraged infrastructure and experience

• We have mission pull from HEOMD and willingness to use the technology from SMD

• We have an NASA-wide directive on a role to fulfill

• We are making progress today with successful technology development accomplishments

We’re seizing the opportunity to demonstrate system-level technology readiness of space fission power