

The Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM) Mission: Advancing precipitation measurement for science and society

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Too much or too little rain can serve as a tipping point for triggering catastrophic flooding and landslides or widespread drought. Knowing when, where and how much rain is falling globally is vital to understanding how vulnerable areas may be more or less impacted by these disasters. Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM) is an international satellite mission to provide next-generation observations of rain and snow worldwide every three hours. The foundation of the GPM mission is the Core Observatory satellite provided by NASA and JAXA. This satellite, launching in early 2014, carries advanced instruments that will set a new standard for precipitation measurements from space. The Core satellite will measure rain and snow using two science instruments: the GPM Microwave Imager (GMI) and the Dual-frequency Precipitation Radar (DPR). The GMI captures precipitation intensities and horizontal patterns, while the DPR provides insights into the three dimensional structure of precipitating particles. Together these two instruments provide a database of measurements against which other partner satellites' microwave observations can be meaningfully compared and combined to make a global precipitation dataset.

Data collected from the Core satellite serves as a reference standard that will unify precipitation measurements from research and operational satellites launched by a consortium of GPM partners in the United States, Japan, France, India, and Europe. The GPM constellation of satellites can observe precipitation over the entire globe within 3 hours of acquisition. The GPM mission will help advance our understanding of Earth's water and energy cycles, improve the forecasting of extreme events that cause natural disasters, and extend current capabilities of using satellite precipitation information to directly benefit society.