

### Last planet

After two days of delays, a piano-sized spacecraft blasted off Thursday in its mission to explore the outer limits of the solar system.

**New Horizons probe**  
 Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Asteroids, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, Kuiper Belt and beyond, Charon.

**The mission**  
 Fastest spacecraft ever launched will reach lunar orbit in just nine hours. A Jupiter flyby will use the planet's gravity to slingshot craft to Pluto, trimming the trip by five years. The probe will spend five months mapping the surfaces and studying the environments of Pluto and its moons.

3.06 billion miles by 2015  
 Spacecraft will be mostly dormant  
 2007  
 2015  
 2016-20

Antenna, SWAP (solar wind), Radioisotope thermoelectric generator, Alice (atmosphere), Ralph (geology), LORRI (high resolution imager)

SOURCE: NASA  
 Andy Fowle • AP

# Earth to Pluto: See you in 9 years

## Spacecraft blasts off from Florida on mission to study smallest planet

By MIKE SCHNEIDER  
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.**  
 A piano-sized spacecraft blasted off Thursday on a 3 billion-mile journey to study Pluto, the solar system's last unexplored planet, and examine a mysterious zone of icy objects at the outer edges of the planetary system.

The New Horizons probe lifted off from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station at 2 p.m., quickly reaching speeds of 36,000 mph, nearly 100 times faster than a jetliner.

"We have ignition and liftoff of NASA's New Horizons spacecraft

on a decade long voyage to visit the planet Pluto and then beyond," said NASA commentator Bruce Buckingham.

It was the swiftest spacecraft ever launched and was expected to reach Earth's moon in nine hours and Jupiter in just over a year.

The distance involved means scientists won't be able to receive data on Pluto until at least July 2015, the earliest the mission is expected to arrive.

After two delays — first because of strong winds Tuesday at the launch pad, and then because of a power outage Wednesday at

the spacecraft's control center in Maryland — New Horizons got off the ground.

"It looked beautiful," said Ralph McNutt Jr. of the Johns Hopkins University of Applied Physics Laboratory, one of the mission scientists. "I was getting a little bit antsy."

The launch drew attention from opponents of nuclear power because the spacecraft is powered by 24 pounds of plutonium, whose natural radioactive decay will generate electricity for the probe's instruments.

NASA and the Department of Energy had estimated the proba-

bility of a launch accident that could release plutonium at 1 in 350. As a precaution, the agencies brought in 16 mobile field teams that can detect radiation and 33 air samplers and monitors.

A successful journey to Pluto would complete an exploration of the planets started by NASA in the early 1960s with unmanned missions to observe Mars, Mercury and Venus.

Pluto is the only planet discovered by a U.S. citizen, though some astronomers dispute Pluto's right to be called a planet. It is an oddball icy dwarf unlike the rocky planets of Mercury, Venus, Earth

and Mars and the gaseous planets of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

Pluto is the brightest body in a zone of the solar system known as the Kuiper Belt, which is made up of thousands of icy, rocky objects including tiny planets whose development was stunted by unknown causes.

The New Horizons spacecraft was launched on an Atlas V rocket, NASA's most powerful launch vehicle. Some NASA safety managers had raised concerns about the rocket's fuel tank since a similar test tank failed a factory pressure evaluation.

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# Former FEMA leader accepts more blame



By TOM GARDNER  
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**MAMMOTH LAKES, Calif.**  
 Former FEMA Director Michael Brown has blamed everyone from the New Orleans mayor to the Louisiana governor for the chaos following Hurricane Katrina. Now, he's including himself.

Brown said Wednesday he fell short in conveying the magnitude of the disaster and was slow in calling for help.

"I should have demanded the military sooner," Brown, former head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, told a gathering of broadcast and National Weather Service meteorologists at a ski resort in the Sierra Nevada.

But Brown, who was relieved from his command in the hurricane region and stepped down from FEMA in September, said it was time to learn from Katrina's aftermath to make things better in the future.

**"I should have demanded the military sooner."**

Michael Brown  
 Ex-FEMA director on his role in the federal response to Hurricane Katrina

"I think it's important to realize that all of us made mistakes. ... After a while you get a different perspective," Brown said after his speech. "I still do believe that things weren't working too well down there."

Brown said he doesn't want to play the blame game.

"Let's figure out what went wrong and what we can do to make it work better next time," he said. "It may not be a Katrina, but it may be a big wildfire out West next time."

Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco said Thursday she was ready to put the issue behind her but

added: "I'm glad that Mike Brown finally set the record straight."

Blanco said the main disagreement with Brown and FEMA was the supply of military help, after she had mobilized the state National Guard.

Brown's comments were in contrast to testimony at a congressional hearing in September, when he blamed most of the government's failures on Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, both Democrats. Specifically, he targeted them for failing to evacuate the city, restore order and improve communication.

"These are not FEMA roles," Brown said at the time. "FEMA doesn't evacuate communities. FEMA does not do law enforcement. FEMA does not do communications."

FEMA came under fire immediately after Katrina struck the Louisiana and Mississippi coastlines Aug. 29, killing more than 1,300 people in five states and leaving 3,200 more unaccounted for.

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