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## NASA Seeks a Near-Earth Asteroid Sample

March 13, 2007

United Press International

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NASA has started detailed planning to obtain a sample of organic material from a small asteroid named RQ36 that regularly crosses Earth's orbit.

It's a treasure trove of organic material, so it holds clues to how Earth formed and life got started, said Joseph Nuth of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Goddard Space Flight Center in Laurel, Md.

Nuth is the project scientist for the proposed OSIRIS mission that will be the first to return a sample of an asteroid to Earth. He said OSIRIS will launch in 2011, acquire a sample from RQ36 in 2013 and return to Earth in 2017, NASA said.

OSIRIS will return 150 grams -- about 5 ounces, said Jason Dworkin, a co-investigator on the OSIRIS project. We'll take it apart almost atom by atom. It will keep a lot of people busy for a long time.

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