

Login Sign Up

Sponsor

November 04, 2012 overcast | 44.1°f

SUPPORT WNYC & PLEDGE TODAY!

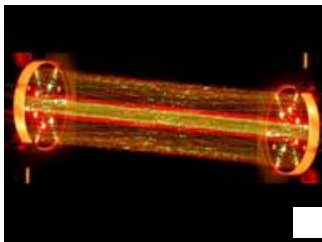
Life On Mars? Curiosity Rover Sniffs For Methane, Comes Up Empty

Friday, November 02, 2012

By Eyder Peralta



Share Tweet 0 Like 0



This picture shows a lab demonstration of the measurement chamber inside the Tunable Laser Spectrometer, an instrument that is part of the Sample Analysis at Mars investigation on NASA's Curiosity rover. (NASA/JPL-Caltech)

Today scientists working on the Mars Curiosity Rover mission made an important announcement: The rover used its lasers to "sniff" for methane. [As NASA explains](#), methane is a "precursor chemical" for life, because creatures like us produce methane.

The Rover came up empty, or rather the most sensitive measurements ever taken in the planet's atmosphere reveal "little to no methane."

[The New Scientist explains](#) that researchers have seen hints of methane using telescopes on Earth. This was an opportunity to try to verify those findings.

The New Scientist reports:

"After four attempts run on two samples, the tests came back essentially empty, or at least with such tiny traces that nothing is definitive. Still, rover scientists say they will keep looking. 'At this

point we don't have a positive detection of methane on Mars. But that could change,' Sushil Atreya, a co-investigator for the SAM instrument, said during a teleconference Friday.

"Atreya said it is possible more robust levels of methane existed on Mars previously but were rapidly destroyed by other gases, such as chlorine, or by the planet's powerful dust storms. So what might have created the past hints? That's anybody's guess, and the rover team is hesitant to name a possible source for a gas they didn't find."

Copyright 2012 National Public Radio. To see more, visit <http://www.npr.org/>.

Source: NPR

Leave a Comment


[Leave a comment](#)

Register for your own account so you can vote on comments, save your favorites, and more. [Learn more.](#)
Please stay on topic, be civil, and be brief.
Email addresses are never displayed, but they are required to confirm your comments. Names are displayed with all comments. We reserve the right to edit any comments posted on this site. Please read the [Comment Guidelines](#) before posting. By leaving a comment, you agree to New York Public Radio's [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms Of Use](#).

Name*

Email address*

< 3:00 4:00 On Air Now 5:00 >



Here's The Thing
In a series of one-hour, on-air specials, award-winning actor Alec Baldwin gives the listener unique entrée into the lives of artists, policy makers and performers. Baldwin sidesteps the predictable by taking listeners inside the dressing rooms, apartments, an...

[Other Formats](#)

Spinning on Air
Session Highlights David Garland presents some highlights from recent years, including Laura Marling, Sufjan Stevens, Antony and ... **5:00**
FM 93.9 AM 820

Lewis Black in Conversation
This fall, Grammy Award winning comedian and America's favorite curmudgeon, Lewis Black returns to Broadway. He sat down with ... **6:00**
FM 93.9 AM 820