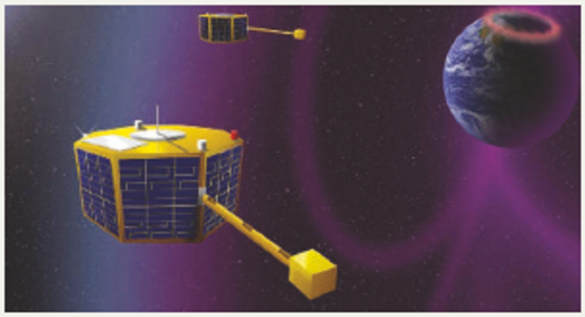
NASA's tiny satellites fly, but private rocket crashes



NASA

NASA's Space Technology 5 mission — a trio of hatbox-sized satellites meant to test miniature components and techniques for formation flying in space — launched successfully on 22 March (artist's impression pictured). A Pegasus rocket fired from an airplane carried the satellites into polar orbit. Scientists hope that future swarms of mini-satellites will have many scientific applications, including studies of space weather from different vantage points in the inner Solar System.

Not so lucky was the privately funded Falcon 1 launcher built by Space Exploration Technologies of El Segundo, California, which failed 30 seconds into its first flight on 24 March. Early analysis pointed to a fuel leak as the cause of an onboard fire that brought the rocket down less than 100 metres from its launch pad on the Pacific atoll of Kwajalein. The company's chief executive, Elon Musk, says he hopes to try again within six months.

But the report says that 10% of children in areas with that much fluoride suffer from severe enamel fluorosis, in which teeth become brown and pitted. Most on the panel agreed that this condition, which is found around the world, can be considered an 'adverse health effect'.

The 450-page study also notes that there are conflicting data on whether high levels of fluoride can be correlated with bone cancers. The EPA says it will now re-evaluate its enforceable limits.

Punchy plan gives Japan's scientists explicit targets

On 1 April, Japan will begin its third five-year science and technology plan. This aims to achieve concrete results from research, and to support young researchers and women.

With a total five-year budget of up to ¥25 trillion (US$215 billion), the plan will try to diversify investment that has so far concentrated on areas such as the life sciences and nanotechnology.

The plan was produced by the government's Council for Science and Technology Policy, which marked out 62 strategic projects as priorities for investment. Each will be assigned targets: for example, launching rockets more than 20 times with a 90% success rate, or becoming the world leader in stem-cell technologies.

"Giving practical targets is an easy way to make the public understand how taxpayers' money is used," says Yasuharu Suematsu of the National Institute of Informatics in Tokyo.

Corrections

In the Editorial "Everybody's fault" (*Nature* **440,** 1; 2006), the location of the proposed scientific peace park should have been identified as the hotly disputed Siachen Glacier. And in an accompanying News Feature on page 16 of the same issue, Jack Shroder was wrongly described as a seismologist; he is a geomorphologist.

Due to an editing error, our piece "Are adverts revealing nuclear secrets?" (*Nature* **440,** 389; 2006) talked of uranium-238 as the fissile isotope, when it should have referred to uranium-235.