

Microsoft's HoloLens going on mission to International Space Station

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Microsoft's HoloLens – goggles that beam holographic images into one's line of vision – can make Earthlings feel as if they are walking on Mars. Now they are actually going into outer space.

NASA will send the devices to the International Space Station, it said Thursday, giving astronauts extra eyes for repairs and other operations.

For example, the HoloLens could make animated repair-guide images hover above equipment being fixed by the crew. It could beam images of what astronauts are seeing down to Earth, so operators back home could send drawings or notes that would appear in front of the HoloLens-wearer.

One of the long-term hopes for the technology is to help astronauts function with less help from Earth, which could open up possibilities for navigating unknown planets.

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“This new technology could also empower future explorers requiring greater autonomy on the journey to Mars,” said Sam Scimemi, director of the International Space Station program, in a statement.

Two of the devices are slated to travel to the space station with a SpaceX supply mission on Sunday, said NASA. Scientists from Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada Flintridge and Houston's Johnson Space Center, the institutes spearheading the program along with NASA, have ensured they will work in microgravity conditions.

NASA tried out the HoloLens at NASA's Weightless Wonder C9 Jet, a testing ground for space. In a video of the tests, people in astronaut jumpsuits give commands to the device, called Sidekick, while wearing dark lenses with a band that wraps around their heads.

“Sidekick, descend from space. Sidekick, accept,” says one.

“I'm drawing,” says another, swirling a finger in the air at images only he can see.

Microsoft touted HoloLens' potential for practical applications at an unveiling in January, naming

doctors and construction workers as professionals who could benefit.

It could also be great for gamers, who flocked to last week's Electronic Entertainment Expo for test runs with the "Halo" video game. A date for HoloLens' public release hasn't been set.

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