NASA to launch fleet of tiny spacecraft to study monster sun storms

Our sun has a bit of a temper. NASA wants to know more about how our star's solar particle storms impact space and the astronauts and spacecraft we send out there.

NASA announced on Monday it is moving forward with the Sun Radio Interferometer Space Experiment (SunRISE) mission. The mission has a $62.6 million price tag and is aiming to launch in 2023.

Solar particle storms are eruptions that spew radiation out into space. This is a major potential hazard for space explorers, both human and robotic. "The more we know about how the sun erupts with space weather events, the more we can mitigate their effects on spacecraft and astronauts," said NASA Heliophysics Division director Nicky Fox in a statement.

SunRISE will consist of six CubeSats, which NASA said are the size of toaster ovens. The solar-powered spacecraft will work together to "create 3D maps to pinpoint where giant particle bursts originate on the sun and how they evolve as they expand outward into space," said NASA.

NASA has been testing out small, inexpensive CubeSats. Notably, it sent two of the tiny machines along on its Insight Mars mission in 2018.

SunRISE falls under the space agency's Explorers Program, which focuses on low-cost missions. The data it collects could help NASA protect its people as humans reach out for the moon and, one day, Mars.

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