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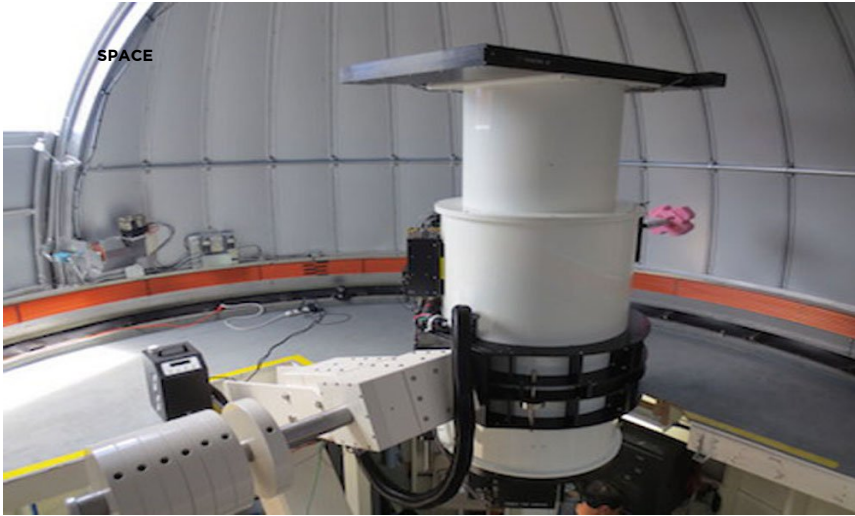
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AUGUST 12, 2015

This telescope warns us of asteroid impacts and saves our butts

by *Chuck Bednar*

The first of two telescopes designed to help astronomers spot potentially dangerous space rocks as part of an asteroid-detection system has been successfully installed at an observatory atop the Haleakala volcano in Maui and is now fully operational.

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Stripes may not protect

The instrument is known as the first Asteroid Terrestrial-impact Last Alert System telescope or ATLAS 1, and according to [Space.com](http://www.space.com/30191-asteroid-impact-early-warning-system-first-telescope.html) (<http://www.space.com/30191-asteroid-impact-early-warning-system-first-telescope.html>), it is one of two telescopes developed at the University of Hawaii and funded by NASA that will be used to protect Earth from potential asteroid impact.

ATLAS project representatives [confirmed](http://fallingstar.com/ua20150730.php) (<http://fallingstar.com/ua20150730.php>) late last month that ATLAS 1 had been mounted and assembled inside the Haleakala Observatory's ASH dome in what they referred to as "a series of remarkably smooth operations" and that it was "working well and producing useful images." The telescope was expected to provide full resolution images once a few adjustments were made.

Warning system will provide enough time for evacuations

Once the ATLAS project is completed later on this year, it will consist of two telescopes located about 100 miles (62 km) apart. The instruments will automatically complete several scans of the entire sky every night in search of moving objects, serving as an early warning system for nearby objects that could pose a danger to cities, towns, or counties on Earth.

It is hoped that ATLAS will be able to provide a one-day warning when a 30-kiloton asteroid is on a trajectory that could result in an impact with the planet's surface, a one-week warning for a larger five-megaton asteroid, and three weeks for a massive 100-megaton rock, according to Space.com.

University of Hawaii Institute for Astronomy professor and ATLAS team member John Tonry [previously stated](http://www.ifa.hawaii.edu/info/press-releases/ATLAS/) (<http://www.ifa.hawaii.edu/info/press-releases/ATLAS/>), "That's enough time to evacuate the area of people, take measures to protect buildings and other infrastructure, and be alert to a tsunami danger generated by ocean impacts."

The second telescope will be placed on Mauna Loa, a volcano located on the main island of Hawaii. ATLAS team officials were expected to meet with officials from the US space agency and South Africa during the International Astronomical Union meeting in Honolulu, the website said. Those talks will reportedly be focused on a possible third telescope in South Africa.

(Image credit: Asteroid Terrestrial-impact Last Alert System Team)

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