

Europe asks price of Mars rover

The European Space Agency has asked Cannes, France, satellite manufacturer Thales Alenia Space to quote a price on the construction of a Mars rover.

The French-Italian satellite company announced it will convene a meeting of its major contractors next week to discuss the rover, which the ESA is planning to send to Mars in 2013, the BBC reported Thursday.

ESA delegations approved the general outline of the ExoMars rover concept in June and industrial workers are now facing a period of refinement and testing for the details of the concept. The vehicle, which is designed to travel over the surface of the red planet in search of past or present life, will be outfitted with a series of scientific instruments.

"We now have a deadline of 8 October for delivery of the full committing proposal from industry," said Vincenzo Giorgio at Thales Alenia Space, the lead industrial partner on the ExoMars project.

"This is a challenge not only because there is August -- normally a holiday all over Europe -- but also because two months is a major challenge anyway to make a full blown proposal," he said.

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