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Electric field found on Saturn's moon

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GRANADA, Spain, Oct. 27 (UPI) -- Spanish physicists say they have discovered unequivocal evidence of electrical activity in the atmosphere of Saturn's largest moon, Titan.

Physicists at the University of Granada and the University of Valencia say their analysis of data from the Huygens space probe proves "in an unequivocal way" the existence of natural electric activity in Titan's atmosphere.

Huygens, a joint mission of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the European Space Agency, was launched in 1997 and landed on Titan in January 2005, sending data for 90 minutes after it reached the surface. The electric field was measured by a sensor on the Huygens probe.

Juan Antonio Morente of the University of Granada said Titan has been considered "a unique world in the Solar System," since a Spanish astronomer discovered in 1908 that it had an atmosphere -- something non-existent elsewhere in the solar system.

"In this moon there are clouds with convective movements and therefore there can be static electric fields and stormy conditions," said Morente, noting electrical activity significantly increases the likelihood organic molecules that are precursors to life could be formed in the atmosphere.

The study appears in the journal Icarus.

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