

Explained in 60 Seconds: Astronomy Matters

Key Words

Written Communication
Case Study

Astronomy is in some ways the very first science. Observational records date back thousands of years, from ancient monuments like Stonehenge in Great Britain to Persepolis in Iran. Supporting astronomy research encourages technological advances that benefit society. Investing in scientific research is a path to economic strength and helps countries maintain a competitive edge in international dealings. Although astronomy naturally focuses on space science, the need to measure, map and move with precision have benefitted many on Earth. Advances in astronomical and space science technology, brought about by applied research, can often have

a greatly beneficial effect for humanity after decades, centuries or even more have passed. Today millions of people worldwide — often unknowingly — are affected by the short- and long-term advances made in astronomy and space science. Astronomy spin-offs include major technological innovations as well as more prosaic devices. There is no short answer to what makes astronomy so important, not for lack of reasons, but because there are so many to choose from. Perhaps the best reply is that astronomy raises our awareness of the Earth's place within the Universe, and improves life for everyone in many ways.

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NGC 1999 is the green tinged cloud towards the top of the image. The dark spot to the right was thought to be a cloud of dense dust and gas until Herschel looked at it. It is in fact a hole that has been blown in the side of NGC 1999 by the jets and winds of gas from the young stellar objects in this region of space. This image combines Herschel PACS 70 and 160 μm data, and 1.6 and 2.2 μm data with the NEWFIRM camera on the Kitt Peak 4-metre telescope. Credit: ESA/HOPS Consortium.

