

**The story...**

The harpoon that clears space junk

**Learn language related to...**

space

**Need-to-know language**

**mission** – (here) journey into space to do something

**space station**– place in which people can live and work in space

**satellite** – object that travels around Earth, often used for receiving and sending information

**orbit** – the path that an object in space takes around a planet, such as Earth

**celestial** – (here) of or from space

**Answer this...**

What is thought to have cracked the window on the International Space Station?

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**Transcript**

This is the moment a harpoon was fired in space striking a target almost dead centre. It was filmed 400km above the Earth. It's the latest experiment from the RemoveDEBRIS spacecraft. Led by Surrey University, it's a **mission** that's testing out the technologies that could clean up space junk.

**Katie Bashford, Surrey Satellite Technology Limited**

It was absolutely a success. And the goal of the experiment was to hit the target. And that's what we did. It's important because there's so much debris up in space – from spacecraft that are no longer operational to bits of rocket body. We really need to start clearing some of this debris out the way to make way for new spacecraft.

Space is becoming increasingly cluttered. It's estimated that there are now nearly 8,000 tonnes of debris with 800,000 pieces the size of a marble or bigger. And each piece has the potential to do some serious damage.

In 2016, this crack in the window of the International **Space Station** was thought to have been caused when a tiny fleck of paint hit it. Bigger objects could do even more harm.

Scientists are particularly worried about a European **satellite** the size of a double-decker bus that stopped working in 2012. It's now threatening other satellites in its path and needs to be removed from its **orbit**.

Last year, the RemoveDEBRIS spacecraft also tested a net, proving it could catch a passing satellite. It's the first mission to try and address this problem. And it's also used its on-board cameras to track a tumbling target - essential for hunting down any rogue space litter.

Its final test will be in the coming weeks. It's set to burn up as it returns to Earth, preventing it from becoming a piece of space junk itself. The hope is now that future missions can be scaled up so the **celestial** deep clean can begin.

### **Did you get it?**

What is thought to have cracked the window on the International Space Station?

A tiny fleck of paint is thought to have cracked the window.