

# Japan scientists make paper planes for space

Wed Feb 6, 2008 12:43pm EST



[Paper space shuttles set for takeoff](#)

KASHIWA CITY, Japan (Reuters) - A spacecraft made of folded paper zooming through the skies may sound far-fetched, but Japanese scientists plan to launch paper planes from the International Space Station to see if they make it back to Earth.

On Wednesday the University of Tokyo researchers tested small, origami planes made of special paper for 30 seconds in 250 degrees Celsius (482 F) heat and wind at seven times the speed of sound. The planes survived the wind tunnel test intact.

The theory is that paper craft, being much lighter than space shuttles, may escape the worst of the friction and heat that much heavier space shuttles face on re-entry to the atmosphere.

"Paper planes are extremely light so they slow down when the air is thin and can gradually descend," said Shinji Suzuki, a professor of aerospace engineering.

Suzuki said the technology might one day be used for unmanned spacecraft.

The team has asked a Japanese astronaut to release the 20 cm (8 inches) long planes, made from paper chemically treated to resist heat and water, from the space station.

It will take several months for the craft to reach Earth and there is no way to predict their landing spot if they make it, Suzuki said.

"It's going to be the space version of a message in a bottle. It will be great if someone picks one up," he said. "We are thinking of writing messages on the planes saying 'if found, please contact us' in a couple of languages."

(Reporting by Yoko Kubota; Editing by Rodney Joyce and Alex Richardson)