



Serving science and protecting the public

A team led by SEA (Group) Ltd, has won a €500,000 (about £375,000) contract from the European Space Agency (ESA) in the Aurora Core Exploration Programme, to define the requirements and initial concept for a Biocontainment Facility.

The facility must protect terrestrial life from any risk or any potential risk that might be posed whilst preserving the scientific content of the Martian samples returned from Mars or from other solar system bodies. A parallel activity at the Natural History Museum, funded by the STFC, will examine potential methods for sterilising the extra-planetary material while not changing the geochemistry.

SEA has assembled a unique team capable of performing this work. A principal subcontractor is the Health Protection Agency (HPA) at Porton Down. HPA has skills in the containment of microorganisms and the design and operation of containment facilities. Other subcontractors include: Bovis Lend Lease UK, experts in the construction of the BSL4 facilities; Gravatom Engineering Systems Ltd, who will provide skills in the robotic handling systems, and the Natural History Museum.

Dr Chris Chaloner of SEA said: "We are delighted to have won this exciting project and our selection reflects SEA's leading role in planetary protection. Our team demonstrates the skills available in these high-technology subjects in the UK and our ability to federate industrial, Government Agency and academic partners, and to work with Research Councils such as STFC to achieve UK strategic aims."