

Maunakea Observatories: Media Statement

July 24, 2019

The following statement can be attributed to Dr. Andy Adamson, Associate Director, Hawai'i Site for Gemini Observatory:

Less than 24 hours after having been denied access to fix a critical issue at the Gemini telescope, two technical staff were able to successfully gain access to the summit facility at approximately 10:00 p.m. Access assurances from activists were offered in advance through law enforcement and the Office of Maunakea Management, provided the observatory could send its technicians immediately.

Observatory personnel were notified at approximately 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday, July 23 that a window of time for road access had been offered, extending only overnight. After risk assessment and careful consideration, Gemini leadership elected to send the two-person crew to attempt the technical work. The crew departed from the Hilo base facility at approximately 10:00 p.m. and successfully entered the Maunakea Access Road at the base of Maunakea at 10:45pm.

Gemini Observatory uses compressed helium - a non-toxic inert gas that exists in the atmosphere naturally - in a cooling circuit to maintain stable low temperatures for two highly-delicate instruments used in astronomical observations. The cooling system needed urgent repair, which required specialized technicians to shut down in order to prevent damage to the instruments and the cooling circuit itself.

The small crew successfully executed their plan to shut off the compressors, shut down and start warming up the two at-risk instruments, disconnect specific joints in the cooling system, and perform a standard facility inspection that is usually conducted on a daily basis during normal operations. The crew concluded their work just after 2:00 a.m. and returned to Gemini's Hilo base facility after 3:00 a.m.

The Observatories hope to return as soon as possible to long-term reliable access to our facilities so that we can resume operations and safely return to scientific observations each night. We are grateful to law enforcement for facilitating safe access for this critical repair work, preventing significant damage to the complex instruments. We are proud of and grateful for the efforts of the two observatory personnel who completed the delicate technical work under such unusual conditions.

[Click here to view the Observatories' July 23 news release describing activists' denial of access for Gemini technicians.](#)

[Click here to access the Maunakea Observatories digital press kit.](#)

[Click here for Dr. Adamson's biography and headshot.](#)

About the Maunakea Observatories

The Maunakea Observatories are a collaboration of independent institutions with telescopes located on Maunakea on the island of Hawai'i. Together, the Observatories make Maunakea the most scientifically productive site for astronomy world-wide. The Maunakea Observatories include: Caltech Submillimeter Observatory, Canada-France-Hawai'i Telescope, Gemini International Observatory, James Clerk Maxwell Telescope (EAO), NASA Infrared Telescope Facility, Subaru Telescope, Submillimeter Array, United Kingdom Infrared Telescope, University of Hawai'i Hilo Educational Telescope, University of Hawai'i 2.2 Meter Telescope, Very Long Baseline Array and W. M. Keck Observatory (Keck I and Keck II).