

## Mars Mission Power

(NAPSA)—If you're like many Americans, you've been excited by the exploits and scientific promise of NASA's Mars Rover Curiosity and the discoveries it's making on the "Red Planet."

The mission may reveal whether there is life on Mars or if there has ever been life there in the past.

Earlier Mars rovers were powered by solar panels, but dust and short winter days reduced their efficiency. For the much larger

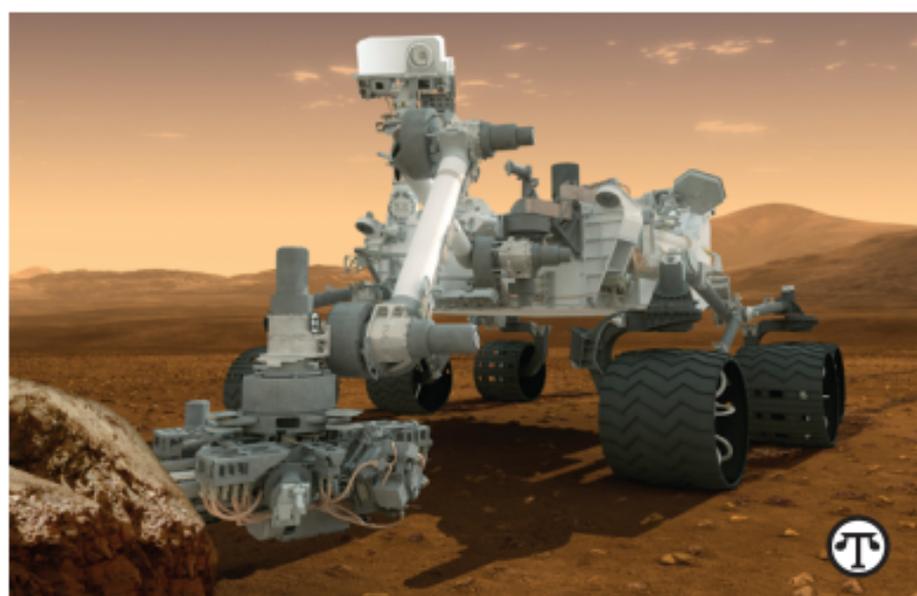


Photo credit: NASA

**A special nuclear power source provides a steady supply of energy to the Mars Rover Curiosity.**

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and more capable Curiosity, which is the size of a small car, NASA chose a different power source—the multi-mission radioisotope thermoelectric generator, or MMRTG. This uses heat from the continuous radioactive decay of plutonium-238, a plutonium isotope with a half-life of 87.7 years, to produce electricity—without any moving parts. The plutonium-238 isotope is nonfissile (that is, it doesn't undergo fission and thus cannot be used in bombs or nuclear reactors).

Learn more at <http://www.newans.org/pi/edu/teachers/reactions/docs/2012-09-10.pdf>.