

## **8th Annual *Science on the Hill* Seeks Congressional Consensus on Solving Space Junk**

*Springer Nature's eighth yearly Science on the Hill event saw Republicans and Democrats gather to discuss the importance of protecting people, the planet, and scientific research from space debris.*

**New York, 22 May 2024** – On May 17th, Friday, in Washington, D.C., Scientific American and Nature Portfolio, both part of Springer Nature, held a [discussion on Capitol Hill](#) on the topic of space debris, space junk, and the dangers they pose. Titled “Safeguarding the Sky: The Science and Policy of Space Junk,” the gathering was hosted by *Scientific American* Senior Editor Clara Moskowitz, moderated by *Scientific American* Senior Editor Lee Billings, and featured a panel of three distinguished experts:

- Dr. Moriba Jah, associate professor of aerospace engineering and engineering mechanics at The University of Texas at Austin and co-founder and chief scientist at Privateer Space, Moriba Jah Universal, and GaiaVerse
- Michelle L. D. Hanlon, space lawyer and Executive Director of the Center for Air and Space Law at the University of Mississippi, CEO of For All Moonkind, and founder of the Institute on Space Law and Ethics
- Dr. Brian Weeden, lead for the policy and regulatory team at The Aerospace Corporation’s Center for Space Policy and Strategy

There are health and financial ramifications to space debris which are only set to grow. In addition to causing greater amounts of pollutants to penetrate Earth’s stratosphere, [Scientific American reports](#) that collisions of orbital debris result in yearly costs of more than \$80 million. Earlier this year, a battery from the International Space Station crashed through [a Floridian’s home](#), highlighting the increasing possibility that falling space junk will result in loss of life. With tens of thousands of satellites set to be launched into orbit by 2030, additional challenges will be created for scientists and researchers unable to study space due to resulting debris.

The event was attended by congressional staffers representing elected U.S. officials across the political spectrum from both the House and Senate, as well as staff from the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, NASA, CRS, and others.

Pointing out a gap in governance around space debris cleanup and the urgency needed, Michelle L. D. Hanlon said: “Under the Outer Space Treaty, once you launch something into space, that object is yours. No one can touch it, no one can move it. It’s very hard under the rubric of freedom to make anyone responsible. [...] We are at the tipping point. We have passed the tipping point. Now is the time to act.”

Highlighting the need for the application of sustainable solutions globally, Moriba Jah said: “What we need is a Circular Space Economy. Every single thing we launch into orbit, its fate is to be garbage. [...] I think there is the possibility of a bottom-up approach. You could have countries create recyclable satellites. You could have countries pay to have someone clean up their debris. But there’s nothing to stop other countries from polluting.”

Revealing the problem of space debris as a consequence of mega constellations which are formed from hundreds to thousands of satellites in Earth’s orbital environment, Brian Weeden said: “The more stuff we put up there, there’s more chance that it will collide with itself and generate more debris faster than the atmosphere cleans it up.”

A recording of the event will be available shortly.

### **About the Springer Nature Group**

Springer Nature opens the doors to discovery for researchers, educators, clinicians and other professionals. Every day, around the globe, our imprints, books, journals, platforms and technology solutions reach millions of people. For over 180 years our brands and imprints have been a trusted source of knowledge to these communities and today, more than ever, we see it as our responsibility to ensure that fundamental knowledge can be found, verified, understood and used by our communities – enabling them to improve outcomes, make progress, and benefit the generations that follow.

Visit: [springernature.com/gp/group](https://springernature.com/gp/group) and follow [@SpringerNature](https://twitter.com/SpringerNature).

## **Contact**

Eseohe Arhebamen-Yamasaki | Head of Communications, US | Springer Nature  
eseohe.yamasaki@springernature.com