# IONIC PLASMA THRUSTER FOR ATMOSPHERIC WATER GENERATION

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**Submitted by**

**ABHYUDAYA SINGH [RA2311005010037]**

**SIDDHARTH KUMAR[RA2311005010040]**

**ROHIT SHARMA[RA2311005010011]**

**VIDEEP BOTHRA[RA2311005010051]**


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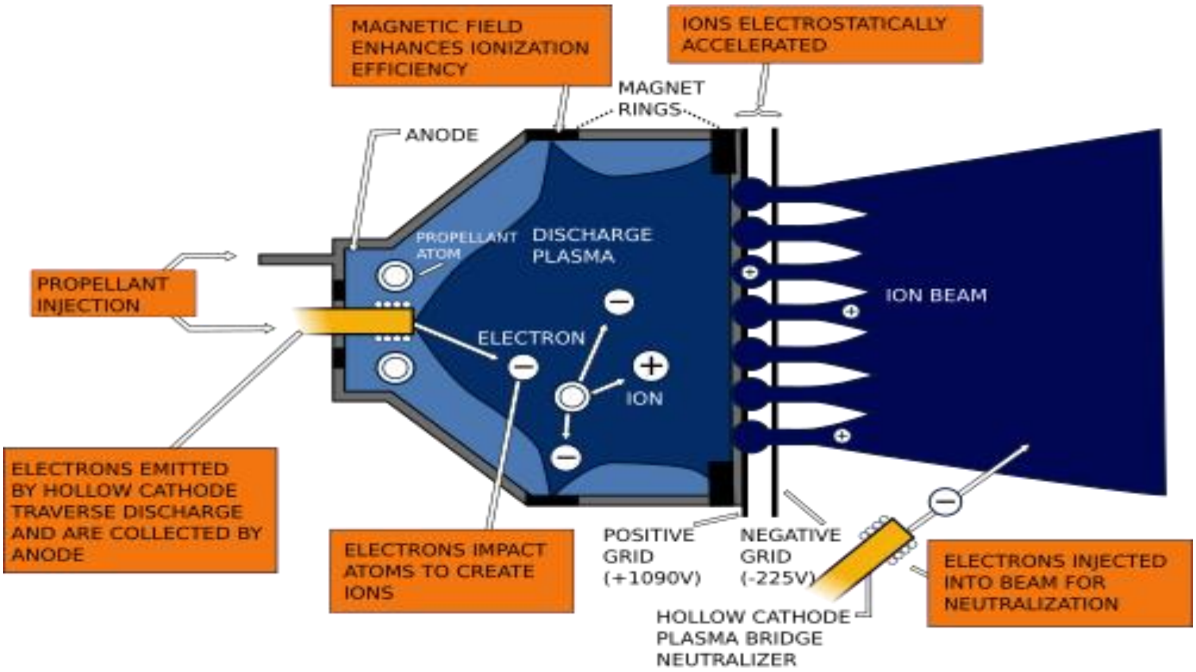
**SRM INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**KATTANKULATHUR – 603203**

# Introduction:-

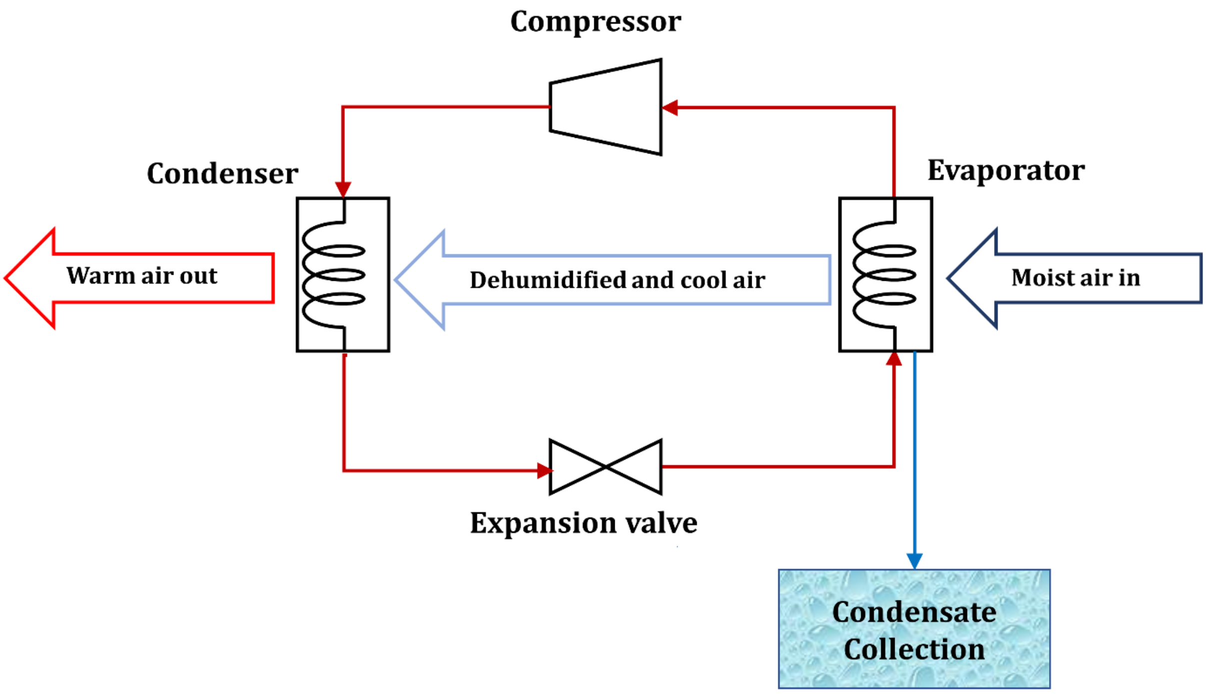
## Overview of Ionic Plasma Thruster Technology




Ionic plasma thrusters (often called ion thrusters or plasma propulsion systems) are propulsion devices that generate thrust by ionizing a gas (creating a plasma) and then accelerating ions (and often electrons or neutralising electrons) out of the thruster to produce momentum. For example, according to NASA documentation, "Most thrusters ionize propellant by electron bombardment: a high-energy electron collides with a neutral atom, releasing electrons and resulting in a positively charged ion."
Key features:

- Ionization of a neutral gas (e.g., xenon) to form plasma.
- Acceleration of the ions via electrostatic grids or electromagnetic/magnetic nozzle systems.
- Typically used in space propulsion where high specific impulse (i.e., high exhaust velocity) is more important than high thrust.

# Overview of Atmospheric Water Generation Challenges and Technologies




Atmospheric water generation (AWG) refers to technologies that extract water from ambient air, either via condensation of water vapour, adsorption/desorption cycles with desiccants/adsorbents, or more emerging methods. Key challenges include:

- Ambient air often has low humidity or dew point temperatures, making condensation energetically expensive.
- Energy consumption tends to increase sharply as humidity falls. For example, in a review the **unit power consumption** (kWh per kg water) rises in lower-humidity/less favourable conditions.
- Dependence on ambient conditions (temperature, relative humidity, airflow) means variable performance.
- Materials/adsorbents face lifecycle, regeneration, and durability challenges.

**Motivation for Integrating Plasma Technologies within Atmospheric Water Generation**

The motivation for looking at plasma or ionic/plasma thruster-related technologies in atmospheric water generation stems from a few conceptual possibilities:

- Plasma/ionisation might enhance nucleation or condensation of water vapour by modifying air chemistry (producing charged species, ions, radicals) which could serve as nucleation sites. See e.g. laser-filament induced condensation.
- Ionic wind or plasma flows could increase air movement, enhance mixing, or draw in ambient humid air more efficiently than passive methods.

- A thruster/ion-engine type device could, in some speculative configuration, create directed flows, pressure gradients or charged-particle environments that could promote moisture capture.
- Combining propulsion or plasma generation with water generation could be attractive in remote or harsh environments (e.g., on high-altitude platforms, spacecraft) where conventional water infrastructure is challenging.

Hence exploring an integration of "ionic plasma thruster" concepts into AWG is of interest for innovation in water generation, especially in unconventional settings.

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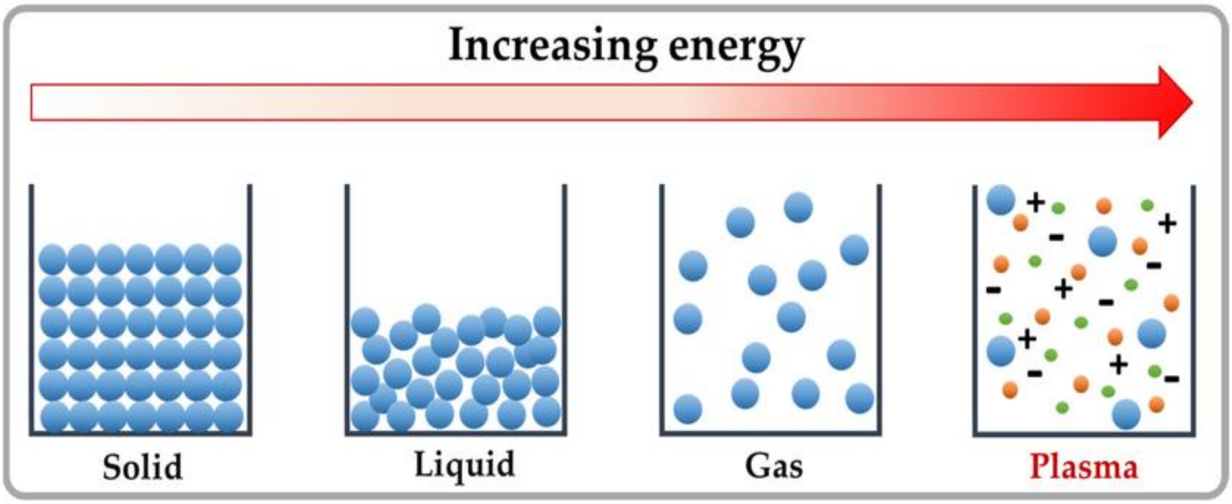
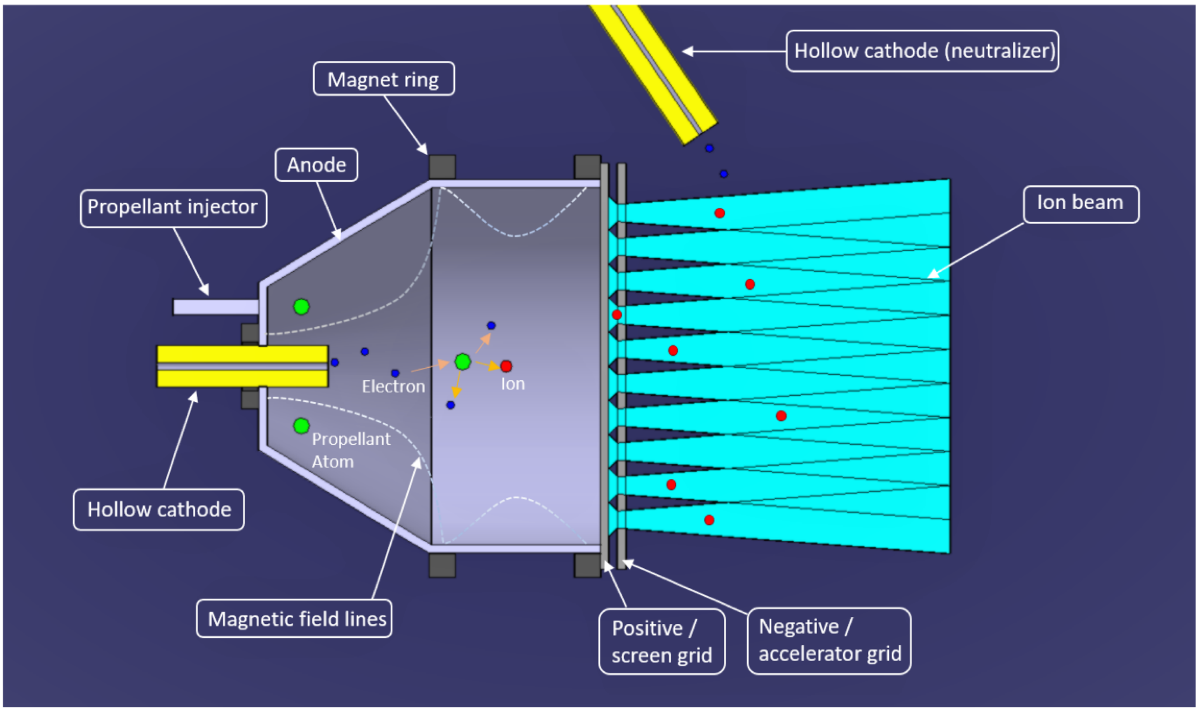
# Ionic Plasma Thruster Technology

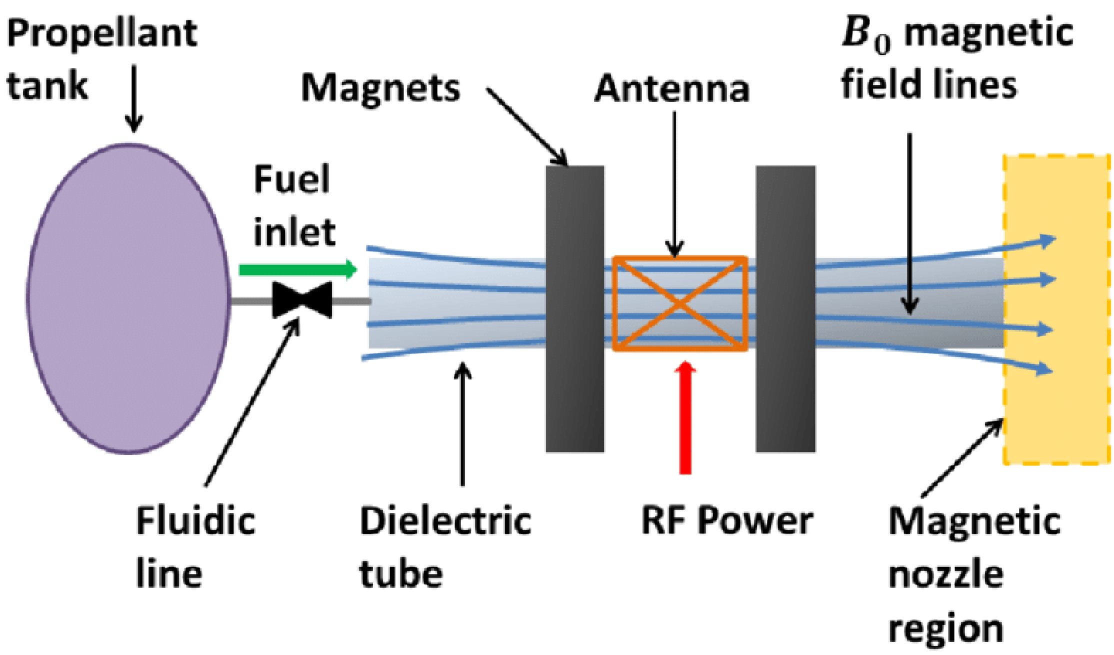
## Principles of Ionization and Plasma Generation




- Ionization involves removing electrons from neutral atoms or molecules (e.g., xenon, argon) to form positive ions and free electrons, creating a plasma (a quasi-neutral mixture of charged particles).
- In plasma thrusters, various methods are used to generate plasma:
  - Radio-frequency (RF) or helicon antennas to generate high-density plasma (e.g., the "Helicon RF plasma thruster" discussed by ESA).
  - Electron bombardment from a hollow cathode to ionize gas (common in gridded ion engines).
- Once plasma is formed, the charged particles can be manipulated by electric and/or magnetic fields.

## Ion Acceleration Mechanisms (Electrostatic Grids, Electromagnetic Fields)

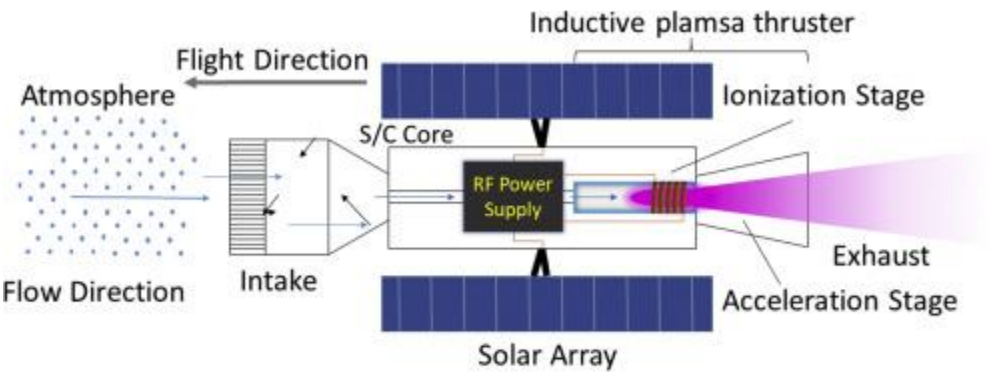



- **Electrostatic acceleration**: In many ion thrusters, a series of grids is used (accelerator and decelerator grids) to establish a strong electric field that accelerates the positive ions out of the thruster. The exhaust velocity may reach tens of km/s.

- **Electromagnetic / magneto-plasma acceleration**: In other designs, such as RF plasma thrusters or electrodeless plasma thrusters, the Lorentz force is used to accelerate plasma (ions and electrons) via magnetic/nozzle or high-frequency fields.
- The accelerated ions produce thrust as they leave the thruster, and a neutraliser (electron emitter) is typically used to avoid charge accumulation. NASA

# Thruster Design and Operation Characteristics




Design components include:

- Propellant supply system (e.g., xenon storage and feed).
- Ionization chamber or discharge region.
- Accelerator grids or magnetic nozzle depending on type.
- Power processing unit (PPU) to generate high voltages and control.
- Neutraliser to inject electrons into the exhaust to maintain charge neutrality. Operation characteristics:
- High specific impulse (efficient acceleration, low propellant mass) but relatively low thrust (compared to chemical rockets) in many space applications.
- In terrestrial/atmospheric use (if considered), additional design challenges appear (e.g., atmospheric pressure, collisional losses, heat management).
- Maintenance of electrode/ grid erosion (in electrostatic types), lifetime concerns.

**Energy Consumption and Efficiency Considerations**

- The energy required to ionize gas and accelerate ions is significant, and system efficiency (input electrical power → kinetic energy of ions → useful thrust) depends on losses in ionisation, grid interception, neutraliser inefficiency, etc.
- For instance, some electrostatic ion engines report propulsive efficiency of ~65–80% in vacuum.

- For integration in atmospheric or water-generation contexts, the key point is that generating and sustaining a plasma requires substantial energy input. Any scheme that uses a plasma thruster-type module for water generation must budget for those energies.
- Moreover, using such thrusters in ambient air (rather than vacuum) adds complications: collisions with neutrals, losses, need for robust cooling, possible contamination, and lower exhaust velocities.
- Therefore, integrating plasma-thruster derived technology into atmospheric water generation implies a trade-off: additional complexity and energy cost vs potential performance benefits.

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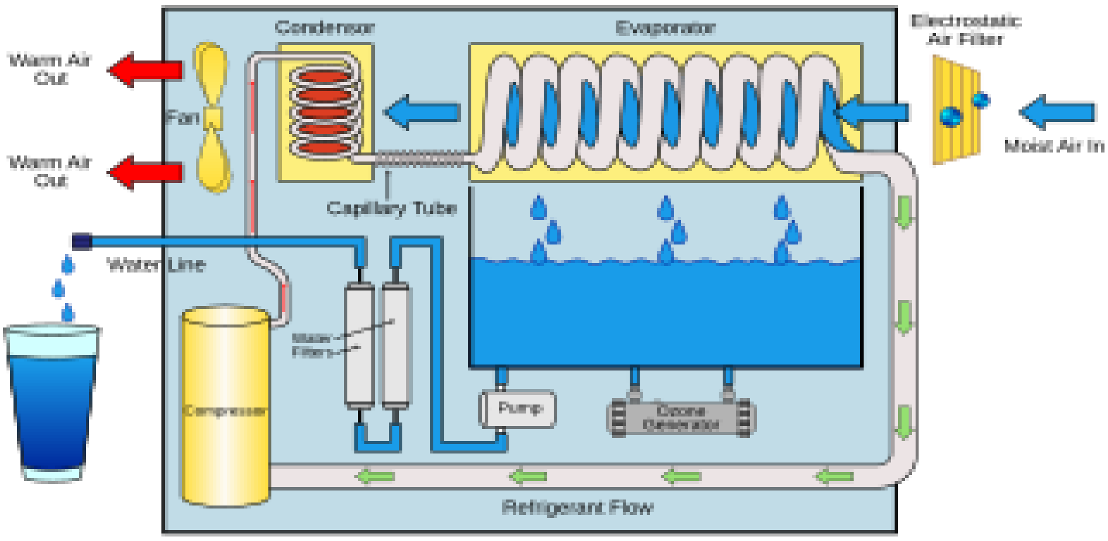
# Atmospheric Water Generation Technologies

## Conventional Air Condensation and Cooling-Based Methods




- The most common AWG approach is air cooling/condensation: ambient humid air is drawn over cooled surfaces (below dew point), causing water vapour to condense into liquid water. For example, a review notes: “Electricity-driven heat exchangers, called atmospheric water generators (AWGs), draw ambient air and guide it over cooled plates where water vapour condenses.”
- Key components: fan/blower, heat exchanger or refrigerant cycle, condensate collector, filtration/purification.
- Performance is strongly dependent on relative humidity (RH) and temperature. Lower RH or higher dew point means more energy is required to cool to condensation.

## Challenges in Scaling, Energy Consumption, and System Complexity

Across all the above integration concepts, significant challenges exist:

- **Energy consumption**: Generating plasma, maintaining ionisation, creating ionic wind or thruster-type flows all consume electrical power. The added energy cost must be justified by significantly increased water yield.
- **System complexity**: Instead of simple consolidation (e.g., a fan + condenser), one now has electrodes/plasma chambers, insulation, high-voltage systems, cooling, and possibly safety/ozone control systems. Complexity means higher maintenance, cost, and reduced reliability in remote or harsh environments.
- **Scaling**: Laboratory demonstrations of plasma-assisted condensation or nucleation often treat small volumes or well-controlled conditions. Scaling to real atmospheric volumes (hundreds of cubic metres per hour) is nontrivial.
- **Ambient conditions dependence**: Many of the beneficial effects (e.g., laser-induced condensation) require high humidity or specific temperature gradients. In arid environments (which are often the target for AWG), the baseline humidity may be too low for the plasma assistance to be effective.
- **Safety and by-products**: Ionisation of air produces ozone, nitrogen oxides, radicals. These must be managed and may pose health/maintenance issues.
- **Cost versus benefit trade-off**: The extra capital cost and operating energy must yield enough incremental water production (or operate in contexts where conventional methods fail) to make sense.

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## Applications and Future Directions

## Use in Remote or Arid Environments

In remote or arid areas where conventional water supply is limited and infrastructure is minimal, AWG systems are of high interest. However:

- In low-humidity (<30%) conditions, energy costs for condensation are high. Research suggests sorption-based AWH may be better in such regimes.
- A plasma-assisted AWG could offer a niche: for example, in a desert environment where wind/airflow is poor and humidity moderate, adding ionic wind or nucleation assistance might boost performance.
- Off-grid remote platforms (e.g., remote monitoring stations, desert outposts) could potentially deploy solar or renewable-powered plasma-AWG systems if the yield is sufficient.

# Potential Use on Spacecraft or High-Altitude Platforms

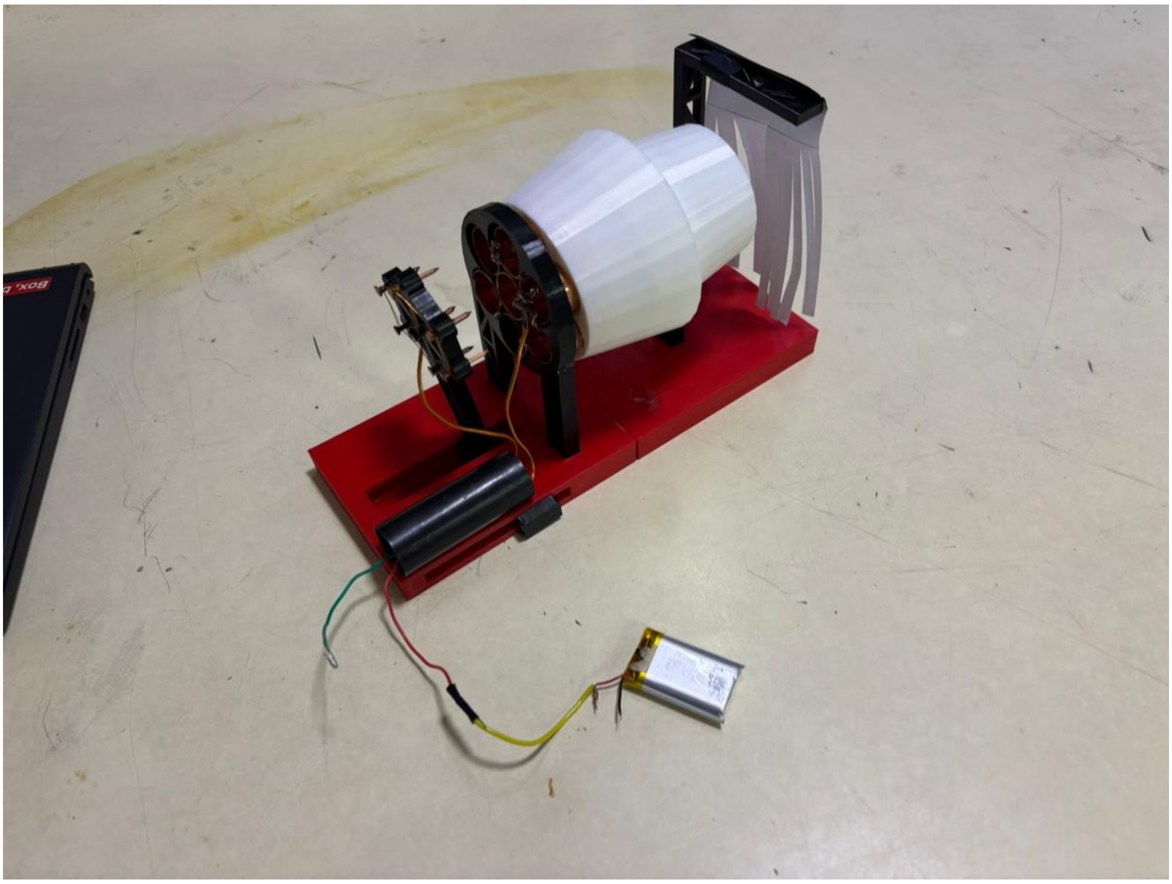
- On a spacecraft or high-altitude platform (e.g., a stratospheric balloon or aircraft), the ambient conditions (lower pressure, higher humidity above certain layers, or capture of moisture from engine exhaust) may allow novel water harvesting.
- A plasma thruster-derived system could serve dual roles: provide modest thrust/airflow plus moisture capture. For example, on long-duration UAVs, they might harvest water from ambient air to provide drinking/distilled water for crew or instruments.
- Challenges are significant: ambient air density is low, energy is at a premium, maintenance is difficult, and systems must be lightweight and reliable.

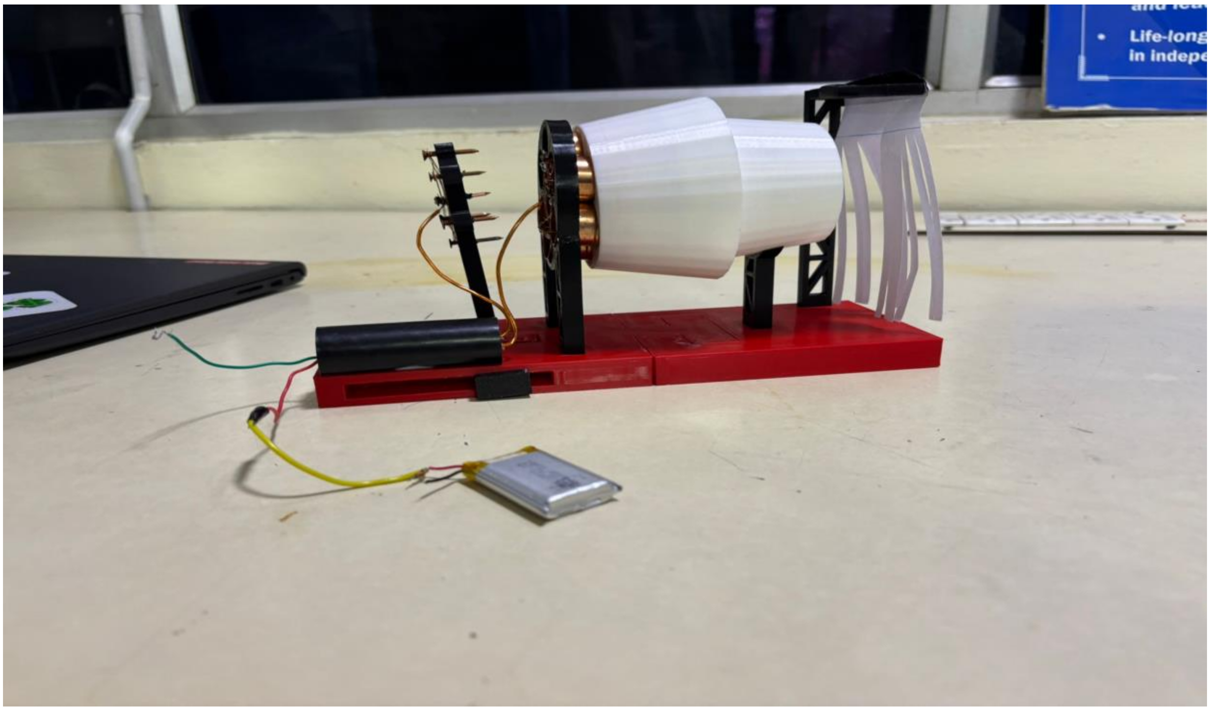
# Research Needs and Technology Development Pathways

Key research directions include:

1. **Quantification of plasma/nucleation enhancement**: How much does ionisation/charged-particle generation reduce the energy cost of condensation or adsorption? Under what humidity/temperature conditions is the benefit maximised?
2. **Low-energy ionisation/plasma generation**: Development of efficient plasma/ionisation devices for ambient-pressure air (not vacuum), that can run from solar or low-power sources.
3. **Integration with airflow and moisture capture surfaces**: Optimization of layouts where ionic wind or plasma-generated flow improves humid air exposure to condensers or adsorbents.
4. **Material durability and by-product control**: Long-term performance of electrodes/plasma devices, prevention of substrate fouling, ozone/NOx mitigation, filtering of resultant water quality issues.
5. **System modelling and lifecycle analysis**: Evaluate full water-per-energy cost (kWh/kg water) including plasma module, blower/ionic wind, condenser or adsorbent, and compare to conventional AWG technologies under varying ambient conditions.
6. **Pilot deployments**: Demonstration in field conditions (remote outpost, desert, high-altitude) to validate performance, reliability and cost-effectiveness.

# Pictures Of The Working Model






# Conclusion

## Summary of Potential and Challenges

This report has explored the possibility of integrating ionic/plasma thruster or plasma-ionisation technologies into atmospheric water generation systems. The potential advantages include enhanced nucleation/condensation via charged-particle or plasma-induced effects, improved airflow via ionic wind, and new system configurations for remote/harsh environments. However, the challenges are substantial: high energy consumption, increased system complexity, dependence on favourable ambient humidity, need for safety/by-product controls (ozone/NOx), and uncertain scaling from lab to large volumes. Conventional AWG methods remain more mature for many scenarios; plasma-assisted approaches are still in research or pilot stage..