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BUSINESS PEOPLE; 3M Scientist Plays Role In NASA Research Plan

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"I would love to go into outer space," Lester O. Krogh, vice president of research and development at the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, said yesterday. "But I'm afraid I'll have to leave that to younger scientists."

The 59-year-old scientist may not meet the age requirements for astronauts, but both he and his company have given space - and its commercial possibilities - a great deal of thought.

Earlier this week 3M submitted terms to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which runs the space shuttle program, of what could be a 10-year agreement between the agency and the company to conduct scientific experiments on as many as 72 shuttle flights through 1995.

The company is hoping that the experiments it conducts will eventually give it the expertise for a commercial operation in space.

"That is the ultimate objective," Mr. Krogh said yesterday.

The agreement that NASA is now studying grew out of discussions that started a year ago, when 3M asked the agency to address a space symposium. Subsequently, a "joint endeavor" agreement was worked out covering two shuttle flights. The company's first experiments - which center on the growth of organic crystals in space - are scheduled to be launched next month.

As it has with other corporate customers, NASA has asked 3M to release the results of its experiments after a prearranged period as a quid pro quo for the free ride. The company has agreed.

But, by offering to help build a research lab in space, 3M is clearly going an extra mile.

"We are pretty thoroughly convinced there is a lot to learn up there," Mr. Krogh said.

As vice president of research and development, a post he has held since October 1982, Mr. Krogh heads a division that has spent \$1.5 billion in the last five years. He said that a "small portion" of the \$40 million the company spent on basic and intermediate-range research last year was related to its space experiments.

Mr. Krogh, who has a doctorate in organic chemistry from the University of Minnesota, joined 3M in 1952 as a senior chemist in the company's central research lab. By 1970, he had risen to executive director at the lab. And in 1981 he was named vice president, research and development, for the company's industrial and consumer sector.

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