



NASA VIA AP

A camera on InSight's robotic arm took this photo after Monday's Mars landing.

## DUST CLEARS ON MARS LANDER

The Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Minutes after touching down on Mars, NASA's InSight spacecraft sent back a "nice and dirty" snapshot of its new digs. Yet the dust-speckled image looked like a work of art to scientists.

The photo revealed a mostly smooth and sandy terrain around the spacecraft with only one sizable rock.

"I'm very, very happy that it looks like we have an incredibly safe and boring landing location," project manager Tom Hoffman said after Monday's touchdown. "That's exactly what we were going for."

A better image came hours later and more are expected in the days ahead, after the dust covers come off the lander's cameras.

The spacecraft arrived on Mars after a perilous, supersonic plunge through its red skies that took just six minutes.

"Touchdown confirmed!" a flight controller called out just before 3 p.m. EST, setting off jubilation among scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, who had waited in suspense for word to reach across 100 million miles of space.

It was NASA's eighth successful landing at Mars since the 1976 Viking probes, and the first in six years. The NASA Curiosity rover, which arrived in 2012, is still on the move on Mars.

Because of the distance between Earth and Mars, it took eight minutes for confirmation to arrive, relayed by a pair of tiny satellites that had been trailing InSight throughout the six-month, 300-million-mile journey.

"Flawless," declared jet propulsion

lab chief engineer Rob Manning. "Sometimes things work out in your favor."

InSight, a \$1 billion international project, includes a German mechanical mole that will burrow down 16 feet to measure Mars' internal heat. The lander also has a French seismometer for measuring quakes, should they exist on our smaller, geologically calmer neighbor. Another experiment will calculate Mars' wobble to reveal the makeup of the planet's core.

Late Monday, NASA reported the spacecraft's vital solar arrays were open and recharging its batteries.

Over the next few Martian days of 24 hours, 39½ minutes, known as sols, flight controllers will assess the health of InSight's all-important robot arm and its science instruments. It will take months to set up and fine-tune the instruments, and lead scientist Bruce Banerdt said he doesn't expect to start getting a stream of solid data until late next spring.

Banerdt called InSight's first snapshot of the surface "nice and dirty." He said the image would be cleaned and the black specks would disappear. That photo came from a camera low on the lander. Late Monday, NASA released a clean photo taken by a higher camera that showed part of the lander and the landscape.

The 800-pound InSight is stationary and will operate from the same spot for the next two years, the duration of a Martian year.

"In the coming months and years even, history books will be rewritten about the interior of Mars," said Jet Propulsion Lab director Michael Watkins.

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