

# Science in the Cinema - Los Angeles

## *Armageddon* and JPL's Donald Yeomans

**Near-Earth Objects: Finding Them Before They Find Us**

**Thursday May 20, 7 PM @ Caltech's Beckman Institute Auditorium**



In *Armageddon*, starring Bruce Willis, the threatening NEO is an asteroid "the size of Texas," which is about a million times larger than any Earth crossing asteroid, but the warning time is just a few weeks. Instead of entrusting planetary defense to trained astronauts or the military, a bunch of amateurs is recruited, given a week of training, and blasted off in two Space Shuttles to intercept the asteroid. Apparently no one told the producers that the Shuttle is limited to low Earth orbits. The job of the astronauts is to drill down about 200 m and plant nuclear explosives. The asteroid set for *Armageddon* does not look at all like an asteroid, and strangely the hole they drill glows orange.

Based on technical accuracy, NASA ranked *Armageddon* the worst film representing the threat of cosmic impact. On the other hand, movies such as *Armageddon* may do more to publicize impact hazard than all previous media coverage taken together. What effect do less-than-technically accurate films have on the public's perception of science?

Based on Dr. David Morrison's review, 5/5/98. <http://impact.arc.nasa.gov/news/1998/may/05.html>

**Donald K. Yeomans** is a Senior Research Scientist, Supervisor of the Solar System Dynamics Group, and Manager of the Near-Earth Object Program Office at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. His group is responsible for providing position predictions for the solar system's planets, natural satellites, comets and asteroids. His group provides impact probabilities for future Earth encounters.

Dr. Yeomans was the Radio Science team chief for the Near-Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) mission. He is currently NASA Project Scientist for the Joint Japanese and U.S. mission to land upon, and return a sample from, a near-Earth asteroid (MUSES-C), and scientific investigator on the Deep Impact mission to collide with comet Tempel 1 in July 2005.



Dr. Yeomans has written over 100 technical papers and four books on comets and asteroids. He has been awarded 15 significant achievement awards by NASA including an Exceptional Service Medal and a Space Act Award. To honor his work in planetary science, asteroid 2956 was renamed 2956 YEOMANS.

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### Science in the Cinema-Los Angeles

The Southern California Section was awarded an American Chemical Society *Innovative Program Grant* to launch the Science in the Cinema-Los Angeles program. Feature films with science themes are screened on local college campuses, followed by a speaker and discussion on a related topic. Admission is free. For more information visit:

**[www.scalacs.org/ScienceCinema](http://www.scalacs.org/ScienceCinema)**