

# 'Space law' regulates the heavens

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Popular Astronomy Club

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Space is indeed the final frontier; the only geographical area comparable on Earth is Antarctica. In some way, space has been apportioned like Antarctica has, with various international governments claiming land and space, but not the whole. In fact, space is governed by an assortment of treaties and international conferences which basically state that no one entity can own the moon, individual celestial bodies or the heavens and galaxies that surround them. What follows is a brief survey of those laws, but as complicated as these laws are, this article is not intended to be another "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy."

After Sputnik 1 was launched Oct. 4, 1957, the United States and other countries began to realize the legal implications of space exploration. Matthew J. Kleiman observes in "Space Law, 101", that before Sputnik's launch, "the legal status of space was unclear." Outer space was treated legally as air-space was treated; national sovereignty included the air space above a country's territory, Mr. Kleiman states. As early as 1919, international law accepted this definition of air space.

According to such a definition, Sputnik orbiting the Earth would have trespassed on the air space of every country it flew over. The United States more or less looked the other way, certainly not "up,"

Elizabeth Howell states in "Who Owns the Moon? Space Law and Other Space Treaties." President Eisenhower indulged the Soviets because he had hope of the U.S. overtaking them in the space race. As a result, rules governing "outer space" began to change, especially those dealing with aircraft.

Today "space law" means international and national laws that rule and govern what we, as humans, do in outer space, according to Mr. Kleiman. The laws will further evolve with the growth of private entities seeking to pick up the space program where the space shuttle program left off.

The International Institute of Space Law:

Nearly fifty countries belong to this global organization that promotes peaceful use of space. IISL's mission is "the promotion of further development of space law and expansion of the rule of law in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes," according to [iislweb.org](http://iislweb.org). In connection with the European Centre for Space Law, IISL holds an annual symposium. Other events include the International Astronautical Congress.

Apparently, the answer to the question of "who owns the moon" is no one and everyone, according to Space.com. While the United States flag presumably remains firmly planted on the lunar landscape, the moon isn't exactly a candidate for statehood.

In fact, the Moon Agreement of 1979 is a treaty signed by 16 nations. It sets standards for use and exploration of the moon. All nations apparently have the right to explore the moon and space in general. The United Nations has been active in implementing international space treaties, just as it has been active in implementing treaties among nations on Earth.

The most important standard of all that is common to all space treaties dictates that the moon and space in general should be explored for the benefit of all people of the Earth, the U.N. Office for Outer Space Affairs states.

Several other treaties were written that dealt with the use and exploration of outer space, according to Space.com. These agreements all deal with rescuing astronauts and legal liability of space travel, use of satellites, use of television broadcasting signals in space, and more. Apparently, the idea of avoiding a real Star Wars scenario was in the minds of those who drafted such treaties.

While modern space explorers continue to travel boldly where no one has gone before, new laws and regulations will accompany them. As private space tourism evolves, the law of space personal injury will also grow, and with it, a new legal specialty in space will skyrocket.