Bulletin of the AAS • Vol. 54, Issue 1 (Obituaries, News & Commentaries, Community Reports)

Rafael Navarro-Gonzalez (1959–2021)

The Planetary Science Newsletter Staff

Published on: Mar 01, 2022

DOI: 10.3847/25c2cfcb.fc60e8fe

License: [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Rafael Navarro-Gonzalez died on Thursday, January 28, 2021. In April 2021, NASA named “Rafael Navarro Mountain” on the planet Mars in his honor.

It is with great sadness we announce the death of chemist and astrobiologist Dr. Rafael Navarro Gonzalez on January 28, 2021 from complications with COVID-19. A tribute to Rafael will be scheduled at a future time when COVID-19 is a lower risk. Rafael was an internationally recognized and talented scientist, the recipient of the 2009 Alexander von Humboldt Medal, the World Academy of Sciences Award in Earth Sciences, and the first recipient of the Molina Fellowship, which are only a few of his awards. His research blends laboratory simulations, field work, and theoretical modeling in chemistry, physics and biology. He identified the role of volcanic lightning in the origin of life on Earth.

Photo credit: Luz Fabiola Aceves Diaz,
<https://mars.nasa.gov/resources/25774/rafael-navarro-gonzalez/>

Navarro-Gonzalez was born in Mexico City on April 25, 1959. He earned a Bachelors in Biology from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and a Doctorate in Chemistry from the University of Maryland at College Park.

Navarro-Gonzalez established the Chemistry Laboratory for Plasmas and Planetary Studies at the Institute of Nuclear Sciences at UNAM. Among his most significant contributions are the detection of organics in Mars-like environments on Earth. He was a Co-Investigator on the Sample Analysis at Mars (SAM) instrument onboard NASA's Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) on the Curiosity rover and on the Habitability: Brine, Irradiation and Temperature (HABIT) instrument onboard ESA's Exomars mission.

Adapted and reproduced with permission from Mark V. Sykes, editor of The Planetary Exploration Newsletter, Vol. 15, No. 7 (2/14/21):

http://planetarynews.org/archive21/pen_v15_n07_210214.txt