

Honorary Degree Nominee
March 12, 2026

Donald Kessler

Dr. Donald J. Kessler is a pioneering leader in the astronomical and aerospace communities whose research transformed our understanding of space safety. He developed the foundational concept known as the Kessler Syndrome, describing how the accumulation of orbital debris could threaten space operations and proposing strategies to manage and mitigate those risks.

As the first head of NASA's Orbital Debris Program Office, Dr. Kessler built the analytical capabilities that remain central to NASA's approach to debris monitoring, mitigation practices, and disposal guidelines. His exceptional contributions earned him NASA's Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement.

Internationally, his work spurred global collaboration on orbital debris mitigation, leading to the creation of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee, a coalition of 13 national and international space agencies that develop consensus guidelines used worldwide. More than four decades later, his research continues to shape global policy and safeguard the long-term sustainability of space operations for the benefit of humanity.

Kessler grew up in Texas. He served in the U.S. Army in the Air Defense Command. He attended the University of Houston beginning in 1962 and studied physics. He began working at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) before graduating from college.