

Largest telescope to be built in B.C.

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Byline: Lora Grindlay
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Plans are underway to build the world's largest telescope in a Port Coquitlam, B.C., warehouse. The international engineering firm **Amec** is taking the lead in plans to build the Thirty Metre Telescope. **Amec's** communications manager, John Kageorge, said the scope, which will take at least 10 years to build, is a big leap from existing technology.

"In a sense, today, astronomers are looking at stars with a black and white television from the 50s. This telescope will give them HDTV -- large screen, too," Kageorge said.

The observatory building that will house the mammoth telescope will be the size of four football fields. The telescope itself will be one football field in size. Suggested locations for its eventual home are northern Chile, northern Mexico and at the top of the Mauna Kea volcano in Hawaii, where many observatories are already located.

The project is the work of an international consortium of universities. Construction is set to begin in 2008.

David Halliday, **Amec's** vice-president and director of special projects, said \$10 million has already been raised toward concept designs. Total costs are expected to reach \$750 million.

Halliday will unveil preliminary drawings for the telescope in a speech to the Vancouver Board of Trade on Wednesday.

Halliday said the largest telescope on Earth today is the Keck telescope in Hawaii that has a 10-metre primary mirror.

"We're moving into a telescope that has 780 little pieces of glass that have to be worked together to come up with the primary mirror," he said. "A lot of the technology that we'll need in order to make this telescope work hasn't really been created yet. It's a big challenge."

Amec has 44,000 employees in North America and Europe.