Saturn mission, and for the military Lincoln Space Satellite."[10] APL monitored RTG developments constantly because of its contracts on the Navy's Transit navigational satellite program, which had been using RTG equipment for 10 years. APL's Dassoulas said that there had been problems with the SNAP-9As and that APL went back and forth between solar and nuclear, keeping an eye on developments in both technologies. During the decade, APL continued its concerns about the vulnerability of its systems and this rekindled its interest in the RTGs.[11] The AEC had new thermoelectrics by then, so Triad could be outfitted with a 30-watt, 24,000 curie Pu-238 RTG as its sole source of power.[12] The launch on 2 September 1972 was successful, and ten years after being placed in orbit, the Triad was still functioning. Dassoulas explained that the Navy did not continue then with RTGs because of an anticipated lag between launches and AEC cutbacks that would curtail production lines. Moreover, improvements in solar power made this source less vulnerable. Reflecting a mounting concern of those years, Dassoulas added that APL did not want to be caught with only nuclear systems if nuclear power in space was finally forbidden.[13]

The Apollo missions that completed the manned lunar landing program—Apollos 14, 15, 16 and 17—all carried SNAP-27s to power an ALSEP to be left on the Moon. The last of those launchings was on 7 December 1972. The Apollo RTGs worked so well they eventually had to be shut down.[14] After the last launch, an AEC program status report showed that even Apollo 12, the first to carry a SNAP-27, which by then had been operating for over three years, was still producing 69 watts of power, compared with its initial output of 74 watts. All the other Apollo SNAPs were producing at least 70 watts at the time of the report.[15] Five years after its deployment on the Moon, the SNAP from Apollo 12 was producing 83.5 percent of its initial power. All five RTG-powered ALSEPs continued to operate until they were shut down on 30 September 1977.[16]

At the start of the decade, a year after the first lunar SNAP flew on Apollo 12, as an honor to the RTG program, a SNAP-27 was presented to the Smithsonian Institution.[17] Public interest in the lunar missions diminished, however, and cuts in funding forced curtailment of the Apollo program. Apollo 17 was the last to fly, as Apollos 18, 19, and 20 were cancelled. With the liftoff of Apollo 17 in December 1972, it seemed to many that it was unlikely man would