

A projectile is fired vertically from Earth's surface with an initial speed v_0 . Neglecting air drag, how far above the surface of Earth will it go? (Use any variable or symbol stated above along with the following as necessary: M_E for the mass of the Earth, r_E for the radius of the Earth, and G for the gravitational constant.)

v_0 - initial speed

M_E - mass of the Earth

r_E - radius of the Earth

G - gravitational constant

The law of conservation of energy:

$$T + U = \text{const}$$

$$T = \frac{mv^2}{2} - \text{kinetic energy}$$

m - mass of the body

v - speed

$$U = -\frac{GMm}{r} - \text{potential energy}$$

The law of conservation of energy in another form:

$$T_1 + U_1 = T_2 + U_2$$

1 - initial state

2 - final state

$$T_1 = \frac{mv_0^2}{2} - \text{initial kinetic energy}$$

$$U_1 = -\frac{GM_E m}{r_E} - \text{initial potential energy}$$

$$\text{If } r = r_{\max}: T_2 = 0 \text{ and } U_2 = -\frac{GM_E m}{r_{\max}}$$

Substitute to the law of conservation of energy:

$$\frac{mv_0^2}{2} - \frac{GM_E m}{r_E} = 0 - \frac{GM_E m}{r_{\max}}$$

$$r_{\max} = -\frac{GM_E}{\frac{v_0^2}{2} - \frac{GM_E}{r_E}} = \frac{r_E}{1 - \frac{v_0^2 r_E}{GM_E}}$$

Distance above the surface of Earth equals:

$$r = r_{\max} - r_E = \frac{r_E}{1 - \frac{v_0^2 r_E}{GM_E}} - r_E = r_E \left(\frac{\frac{v_0^2 r_E}{GM_E}}{1 - \frac{v_0^2 r_E}{GM_E}} \right) = \frac{r_E}{\frac{GM_E}{v_0^2 r_E} - 1}$$

$$\text{If } 1 - \frac{v_0^2 r_E}{GM_E} > 0$$

Finally:

$$\text{if } v_0^2 \geq GM_E/r_E \quad r = \infty$$

$$\text{Answer: if } v_0^2 < GM_E/r_E \quad r = \frac{r_E}{\frac{GM_E}{v_0^2 r_E} - 1}, \quad \text{if } v_0^2 \geq GM_E/r_E \quad r = \infty$$