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A meteorite impacts Russia, causing damage and raising questions

February 16, 2013

By Michelle Horst - Journal staff writer (mhorst@journal-news.net) , journal-news.net[Save](#) | [Comments \(8\)](#) | [Post a comment](#) |

SHEPHERDSTOWN - Most people would be alarmed to know that something the size of a bus could pierce Earth's atmosphere without early detection. However, this does not mean it was a matter of negligence, but a matter of not being able to sweep every piece of the sky at once.

Dr. Jason Best, professor of astronomy and astrophysics at Shepherd University, Dr. Jason Best, said the idea of NASA's discovery program is to take the highest technology and study the skies for near-Earth objects.

"Using telescopes and very sensitive cameras, astronomers are sweeping the night skies in an attempt to discover these types of objects around the Earth," Best said.

Article Photos



AP photo

The challenge is that you have to be able to search the sky for faint objects and look everywhere at every moment. With unlimited telescopes and unlimited time dedicated to the sky, these things could be detected - but this is not the case.

"No matter how hard we are looking, there's always a chance that something will be missed," Best said. "As we increase our focus and resources in this, astronomers will develop a much better sense of the sky and be able to make even more significant discoveries."

After a meteor caught the space community by surprise when it crashed into Russia Friday, a 150-foot asteroid, which was previously detected, passed near Earth on its heels.

According to The European Space Agency and NASA, the events were unrelated.

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Best said the process of searching for near-Earth objects could be compared to searching for bugs around your house. If you do not spend the entire time observing the entirety of the house, something can go unseen.

Now, try observing the entirety of the universe.

What the space community is attempting to do is build up a database of the skies, in order to search the largest amount possible.

With a clear night, a large telescope and the greatest distance, Best said observations and discoveries could be truly phenomenal.

Best said by being able to look through all of space, it is amazing that scientists can see the near-Earth objects they do. He said just like preparing for any natural disaster, it's imperative to what we have to do as a country to make sure we are investing in our ability to explore and discover.

What Friday's events have proved is that people, all over the world, are still interested in space.

"Our sky is newsworthy. People care about this; people still care about the universe," he said, adding that many people stopped by his office to talk with him about the events.

With the blast through social media, videos that were posted on the Internet and professional agencies around the world that began buzzing about the meteor and asteroid, Best said there was a worldwide dialogue that was beginning to help people connect with the universe.

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