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Idaho Statesman

Glowing object streaks across eastern sky

A glowing, flashing object streaked across the eastern sky about 6:30 p.m. Thursday, leaving a mile-long path of disintegrating particles in its wake, witnesses said.

The object was spewing out sparks and glowing red as it descended in the sky, one witness said. Another caller to The Statesman described it as "a silver-yellow fireball which left a trail of smoke that turned to a bluish white when the sun set." A third Boise witness said it looked like a "rocket kids fire on the Fourth of July."

Dennis Orme, a controller at the Boise Air Terminal, said he had received calls from Meridian, Emmett and Mountain Home inquiring about the streak. He said it must have been at a very high altitude because people in different locations disagreed on the object's angle of descent.

Orme said the meteor's trail, which to many witnesses looked like smoke from an airplane, lasted about 30 minutes. Other

witnesses said it lasted from 10 minutes to three hours.

The head of the object was so bright, Orme said, that it looked like burning magnesium.

Boise State University Physics Professor Robert Luke, who did not see the object, said several things about the object did not fit the pattern of a meteor. He said most meteors burn up too high in the atmosphere to be seen. He said burning and a long trail of particles suspended in the air are not usually associated with meteors.

But he said the way a meteor disintegrated in the atmosphere would depend on what it is made of.

National Weather Service Forecaster Lloyd Graybill said he thought it was a piece of satellite or some other man-made object. "There is so much junk up there (in orbit) that pieces are always falling down. It is actually fairly common," he said. "Almost all of the stuff up there has a life, then they run out of speed and come crashing down."

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