

STRAITS TIMES (S'pore)
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Crash object may be radioactive Soviet satellite

A GOVERNMENT observatory today issued a warning about possible radiation hazards from what is believed to be a Soviet satellite that crashed to earth in north-west Australia last night.

Police reported several sightings of a "greenish-white" object falling to earth near the mining town of Marble Bar, 1,400 km north of Perth.

Mr Mike Candy, an astronomer at the Perth Observatory, said the object was probably Cosmos 434, a Soviet satellite launched in 1971 and due for re-entry Aug 20. Mr Candy said he tracked the object last night.

Sightings

If the satellite was carrying a large transmitter, he said, it was likely to be nuclear-powered and possibly radioactive.

"Another Russian satellite which landed in Canada some years ago had been found to be radioactive," he added.

But, Mr Candy said, the satellite could be solar-

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powered and therefore not radioactive.

The Soviet Embassy in Canberra made no comment on the incident today.

Police in four towns in the area reported receiving calls about a brilliant object that appeared for two or three minutes on Sunday at 6.30 p.m.

Air traffic controllers at Port Hedland, about 193km north of Marble Bar, said aircraft crews had confirmed the sightings.

Reports from Cape Keraudren, 96 km north of Port Hedland, said the object appeared to disintegrate over the sea, while callers from further south said it appeared to hit the ground after breaking up.

Canberra officials said they were unable to confirm what, if anything, may have fallen in the area.

The object would not be the first space vehicle to fall on Australian soil. The 72-tonne US Skylab crashed to earth in south-west Australia in July 1979. — UPI.