

No explanation, as Anchorage's strange lights return

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ANCHORAGE — Uh-oh, they came back. Those eerie amber lights that dotted the city's skies during the weekend showed up late Monday for an encore.

The lights appeared at about 9 p.m. and seemed to float over west Anchorage. Spectators and officials were at a loss to explain the lights' source.

As many as 12 lights appeared in the western sky. Some glowed alone, while others appeared in crude designs or in straight lines of three to four lights each.

"There were a couple lights, but we couldn't tell what they were," said Roger Carpenter, team supervisor at the Anchorage International Airport Federal Aviation Administration control tower. "We didn't see anything on the tower radar."

Federal officials dismissed the

lights that appeared over Anchorage late Sunday as hot-air balloons, but the head of a balloonists' group says he doubted the explanation.

Alaska Air Mushers Association President Don Reed said the city's hot-air balloonists were at a banquet Sunday when the lights were reported, and he said "nobody in their right mind" would attempt a night flight without proper gear.

"There is only one balloon in town that's equipped for night flying, and there's only one set of lights," he said. "And that set isn't even working."

The mysterious lights apparently were visible over the city between 10:30 p.m. and 11 p.m. on Sunday.

The police department said it got calls from about 30 people who said they had seen the lights. They also were seen by police officers.

"Some of the same officers who saw the lights Sunday night saw them again tonight and said, 'Yep,

that's them,'" said Randi Goode, communications supervisor at the department.

Chris Hanson, who spotted the lights Sunday night, said he saw "distinct balls of light" moving over the city. He said at first he thought they may have been part of the Fur Rendezvous celebration, perhaps flares or a child's trick.

"I thought it might have been little

kids putting candles in paper bags," he said.

But seconds after seeing the first lights, another moved silently across the sky, slowed, and joined the first group, he said. Then another came and hovered near the growing flock of lights.

"That was something that little paper bags and candles can't do," he said.