

# Mystery lights dazzle observers, puzzle astronomers and officials

## The Associated Press

A mysterious light show that flashed across the night sky east of the Mississippi sparked earthbound debate Wednesday with few able to agree on what caused it.

It was described as everything from a pinpoint to a moving spiral to a glowing cloud to "a big ball of fire," although astronomers said it probably was related to the annual Perseid meteor shower.

Residents of one Kentucky county said they saw a bright flash and then their houses shook when something went bump in the night with a bang like dynamite.

"It was the scariest thing I ever saw, but it was pretty, all white," said Brenda Newton of Rochester, N.Y., who saw the light about 10 p.m. Tuesday when she and her parents went looking for a place to watch the annual Perseid meteor shower.

"It was definitely not a meteor," Denise Sabatini, vice president of the Syracuse, N.Y., Astronomical Society said. "Meteors burn off after seconds.

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This lasted five to seven minutes. It was really quite spectacular."

Some speculated it was a satellite or rocket release of barium gas, used to study the upper atmosphere. But workers at Cape Canaveral, Fla., the North American Aerospace Defense Command in Colorado Springs, Colo., and the NASA facility at Wallops Island, Va., all confirmed there were no launches Tuesday.

Others thought it might be a satellite breaking up in the atmosphere.

"We didn't show any scheduled space objects to re-enter the atmosphere at that date and time and location. Right now that's all we have on it," said Capt. Sigmund Adams, media relations staff officer for the Aerospace Defense Command, which tracks satellites.

There was speculation it was the failure of a new Japanese satellite. But officials at Japan's Tanegashima Space Center said there was nothing wrong with the vehicle.

At Ohio's Bowling Green State University, physics and astronomy Professor Ronald Stoner said he suspected the display was caused by the Perseid meteor shower, produced by the remnants of a comet.

"It is caused by little bits and pieces of dust from the comet. They're very small," he said. "If there were a larger piece, and an icy piece of material, something about the size of a snowflake, it might well cause something like this. It would vaporize and leave a glowing cloud behind it."