

Bright lights were rocket breaking up

The bright lights that many Lincoln residents saw Saturday night were pieces of a rocket body that broke up over the Northern Plains, authorities said.

"It has now been confirmed by the North American Air Defense Command that the bright flashes in the sky above Nebraska between 8:50 p.m. and 9 p.m. were caused by a disintegrating rocket body," the National Weather Service said in a public news release. "The rocket body burned up due to frictional heat generated in falling through the earth's atmosphere."

The spectacular disintegration was visible in Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, Missouri and Arkansas. Observers reported seeing vividly colored streaks of blue, red and other hues.

Earlier in the evening the Weather Service had reported that the bright flashes apparently were caused by a large meteor breaking apart as it entered the atmosphere over Nebraska.

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Lights

The report was based on observations by people who called the weather service from Scottsbluff, North Platte, Grand Island and Omaha, the weather service said.

In Lincoln the phenomenon was seen by individuals and large crowds.

"We had about 30 people out Christmas caroling and we saw these lights going across the sky. They were coming from the northwest going to the southeast. I thought they were three jet planes flying in formation with their lights on but there was no sound," said Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Director Garner Stoll. He reported seeing the bright lights about 9 p.m. near 28th and D streets.

The Lancaster County sheriff's office and Lincoln police reported receiving many calls about the lights.

Chris Headlee said she and her husband, Kevin, were leaving Bob Devaney Sports Center when they saw three bright lights fly over the building about 8:50 p.m.

"There was not a sound. We stood out-

side of the car and watched the thing until it went out of sight and there was not a sound at all," Mrs. Headlee said.

"It looked like it was coming from the direction of the airport when we first saw it, and we assumed it was a plane taking off. As it came towards our direction, the lights were pointing in the opposite direction of the movement and that didn't make sense," she said.

Mrs. Headlee and several other observers said they saw no shadows or shapes behind the lights, nor did they hear any sounds.

A 44-year-old Lincoln resident who saw the lights reported seeing "sparks coming off" the objects.

"It was amazing how bright the lights were. They looked like airplane lights. They were bright," he said.

Several Duncan Aviation employees saw the lights as they moved across Lincoln Municipal Airport.

"I've worked out here for nine years and have never seen anything like it," said crew chief Mark Shoemaker. "It was freaky."

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