

# UFOs 'radon gas'

## Professor links 1970s sightings to earthquakes

By John Lyons  
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CARMAN — Unidentified flying objects, like almost everything else, may cause cancer — and that could mean trouble for residents here who experienced a rash of unexplained sightings in the 1970s.

Laurentian University professor Michael Persinger says that what residents saw weren't alien spacecrafts, but intense energy associated with earthquakes.

UFO reports in Carman from 1974 to 1977 are attributable to minor earthquake activity in southern Minnesota, Persinger said in a telephone interview from Sudbury, Ont.

The strong energy and radon gas associated with the intense lights often mistaken for UFOs may cause cancer in people who are exposed to them, he said.

"There's no reason to panic people at this point," Persinger said, adding further studies should be done to determine the effects of the bright lights that flashed here in the evening skies.

Bob Diemert, for one, is certainly not panicked by Persinger's theory.

The Carman aircraft restorer claims to have seen UFOs more than 100 times in a four-month period in 1975.

Several times, Diemert claimed, he was close enough to see the gridwork on the ship, which residents dubbed Charlie Red Star.

Charlie, he said, was not electrical energy, but solid matter.

"These guys are always great at making hypotheses when they've never seen one," he said.

The saucers stayed here, Diemert said, because it is close to the United States border and has a radio tower to mark the location.

The ships would fly into North Dakota every night, he said, adamant in his belief the UFOs examined U.S. missile bases. Canada was simply a safe refuge where the U.S. air force would not chase them, he said.

### Came from U.S.

"They came in from the U.S. every night at 10 p.m. You could almost set your watch by them."

Unlike Diemert, *Valley Leader* publisher Howard Bennett doesn't have an explanation for the lights he saw on two separate occasions.

"I've tried to justify it, but I don't know what it was, I have no idea. But I can't understand this guy trying to put it down to 'faults,'" Bennett said.

Hundreds of people reported seeing Charlie Red Star. When sightings were at their peak, people would line the roadsides to catch a glimpse of the objects.

Persinger maintains, however, that the lights were electric charges created from subterranean strain.

Sightings peaked two months before seismic activity 500 kilometres away in July 1975, he wrote in a published article.

The electromagnetic fields created by underground strain, he said,

could lead to increases in leukemia, brain tumors and depression, similar to the effects of long-term exposure to high-voltage hydro lines.

He said the risk from brief exposure to the lights is undetermined, and he called for a health study of area residents.

Persinger said he holds out a belief that extraterrestrials may visit Earth, but that sightings here were definitely energy masses somewhat akin to ball lightning.

Chris Rutkowski, a Winnipeg UFO researcher, has some 700 Manitoba sightings on file.

Rutkowski dismisses Persinger's theory and has published several articles criticizing Persinger's methods.

"Why don't these lights appear down there (in Minnesota)?" Rutkowski said.