

Approximately 4,000 balloons are released in the U.S. every day. There are two general types of balloons: weather balloons and upper air research balloons. Balloons will vary from 1 foot to 2 feet in diameter to large upper air balloons 200 feet in diameter. The majority released at night carry fluorocarbon dyes which often contribute to the unusual appearance when observed at night. This also holds true when observed near dawn or sunset because of the effect of the direct rays of the sun upon the balloon surfaces. The large balloons, if caught in jet streams, may assume a long horizontal position when partially inflated, and move with speeds of over 200 MPH. Large ones may be observed flared on top. The effect of the latter two conditions can be startling even to experienced pilots.

Many modern aircraft, particularly jets and delta wing types, under adverse weather and sighting conditions are reported as unusual shapes and "flying saucers." When observed at high altitudes, reflecting sunlight off their surfaces or when only their jet exhausts are visible at night, aircraft can have appearances ranging from disc to gamma in shape. Single jet boosters having multi-jet pods under their cockpit which have been reported as UFO's or "saucers" in "X" formation. Vapor trails will often appear to show with sharp red or orange streaks after following a flight. Other factors are frequently reported as UFO's.

The astronomical category includes bright stars, planets, comets, moons, and other celestial bodies. When observed through haze, light fog, or moving clouds, the planets Venus, Mars, and Jupiter have often been reported as unconventional, moving objects. Attempts to observe astronomical bodies through haze-filled skies under adverse sky conditions had been a source of many UFO reports.

The "other" category includes reflections, searchlights, birds, kites, blimps, kites, windmills, surface radar installations, houses, flower displays, flares, fireworks, ice crystals, balloons, etc., as examples. Large formation geese flying low over a city at night with search lights reflecting off their bottom; searchlights playing on scattered clouds, appearing as moving disc-like shapes.

The insufficient data category includes all sightings where essential or sufficient items of information are missing, making it impossible to form a valid conclusion. These include misperceptions of the sighting by an emotional witness; description of the size, shape or color of the object; direction and altitude; exact time and location; and weather conditions, etc. This category is not used as a convenient way to get rid of what might be referred to as "unidentified" activity. Every sighting is not an unidentified witness or if the data received is insufficient or unrelated, the analysis must then place that particular report in this category. The Air Force seeks complete information to reach a valid conclusion. Air Force officials stressed the fact that an answer would need a complete report of a bona fide sighting to the nearest Air Force activity. Their reports will be promptly forwarded to the proper office for analysis and evaluation.

A sighting is considered unidentified when a report contains all pertinent data necessary to normally suggest at least one valid hypothesis or the cause of explanation of the sighting but when the description of the object and the witnesses cannot be correlated with any known object or phenomenon. In the "Unidentified Sighting" report (R) released in October 1957, the Air Force stated that unidentified sightings in the unidentified category had been reduced to 1 percent at that time.