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### Roswellian 'Unearthly' Silicon Scoffed At By

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Scientists Scoff at Chunk of Roswellian 'Unearthly' Silicon

By John Fleck=20  
Journal Staff Writer=20

A chunk of silicon touted earlier this month as unearthly scientific proof that a UFO crashed near Roswell 50 years ago easily could have been cooked up in any college chemistry lab, scientists say.=20

Even the scientist who made the original out-of-this-world claim at a July 4 Roswell news conference that the material couldn't have been made on Earth now acknowledges the evidence is "inconclusive."=20

"In retrospect, with 20/20 hindsight, I would have been a little more careful with my language," said San Diego chemist Russell VernonClark in a telephone interview Thursday.=20

During the frenzied 50th anniversary celebrations of an alleged alien crash in New Mexico, VernonClark stood on a stage and said of the fragment of silicon: "It is impossible for it to be from Earth."=20

It was one of the most remarkable events during the 50th anniversary celebration, which drew thousands of people who paraded in strange costumes and bought large quantities of UFO paraphernalia.=20

But in the weeks since, VernonClark's work has been subjected to a withering critique by other scientists.=20

In the interview Thursday, he said he should have acknowledged during the news conference the possibility the material could have been manufactured on Earth.=20

Scientists studying VernonClark's data, which the chemist published on the Internet, point to serious flaws.=20

"There's just a number of huge mistakes in that report, holes big enough to run a dump truck through," said Albuquerque physicist Dave Thomas.=20

Among the problems: VernonClark's claim that the alleged 50-year-old spacecraft debris contained detectable amounts of the element germanium-75, a substance so radioactive scientists say it would decay into other elements in less than a day.=20

But even looking beyond the alleged flaws in the data, the scientists say the claim the material must be extraterrestrial because of its unusual characteristics doesn't hold up.=20

The ingredients to make it could be purchased from chemical supply houses, they said, and easily mixed together in any university chemistry lab.=20

"You could do it here," said University of Kentucky chemist Rob Toreki.=20

"There's no validity to what he's saying," Toreki said of VernonClark's claim.=20

At the news conference, television producer Paul Davids, who produced a fictional account of the alleged UFO crash near Roswell, told reporters the material came from someone who claimed to have gotten it from the 1947 crash of an alien spacecraft near Roswell.=20

VernonClark, a chemist who works as an environmental health and safety specialist in the chemistry laboratory at the University of California, San Diego, said he was skeptical when he first got the sample.=20

But VernonClark said that when he tested it, he was surprised by the results.=20

He sent it to a second, unidentified scientist for additional tests, with similarly surprising results, he said.=20

VernonClark's evidence that the material is extraterrestrial is based on an analysis of the types of silicon and other chemicals in the object.=20

The atoms of a chemical such as silicon come in different types, called "isotopes." The ratios of the different isotopes of naturally occurring silicon on Earth provide a sort of fingerprint, and scientists believe elements such as silicon formed in other parts of the galaxy would have different isotopic fingerprints.=20

VernonClark said he and his unidentified colleague found isotopic fingerprints in the mystery material that didn't match the fingerprint of natural silicon on Earth.=20

The problem, Toreki explained, is that the isotopic fingerprint in VernonClark's data would be relatively easy for a chemist to manufacture.=20

For example, scientists can buy purified silicon of a number of different isotopes from the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory, said Sandia National Laboratories scientist Dick Coats.=20

All you need to make a material as "unearthly" as VernonClark's sample is to mix up some of those Oak Ridge samples in a chemistry lab, Toreki and Thomas said.=20

In the interview this week, VernonClark acknowledged he has no proof the material is extraterrestrial, but said he still believes it's a strong possibility.=20

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