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AP: Study - Asteroid Could Flood Coast

From: **RSchatte** <RSchatte@aol.com> [Rebecca]
Date: Thu, 8 Jan 1998 09:59:46 EST
Fwd Date: Thu, 08 Jan 1998 14:39:35 -0500
Subject: AP: Study - Asteroid Could Flood Coast

From: AOL News <AOLNews@aol.com>
Subject: Study: Asteroid Could Flood Coast
Date: Thu, 8 Jan 1998 03:33:59 EST

Study: Asteroid Could Flood Coast

.c The Associated Press

By PAUL RECER

WASHINGTON (AP) - If a 3-mile-wide rock from space smashed into the Atlantic Ocean it would drown most of the upper East Coast in the largest tidal wave in recorded history, a study finds.

Astrophysicist Jack Hills of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, heading a team to investigate such things, said Wednesday findings by his group leads to the conclusion that such a disaster from outer space is not far-fetched.

Any 100-year period, a lifetime for many people, has a 2 percent to 3 percent chance that an asteroid would splash into either the Pacific or Atlantic ocean and cause widespread coastal flooding.

An asteroid striking water at thousands of miles an hour could send a 300-foot-tall wall of water racing across the ocean at the speed of a jet plane, Hills said. The wave would stop only after it smashed ashore, and as the water retreated over many square miles, it would scour the land, rip apart buildings, erode vast areas.

The result, Hills said: disaster.

``The damage would be unprecedented in human history,''' said Hills, speaking at the national meeting of the American Astronomical Society. ``It would kill millions of people and cause billions in damage.'''

Based on computer simulations of what would ensue if an asteroid smashed into the central Atlantic, Hills said all of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia would be inundated. In New York, Long Island and Manhattan would be swamped.

Florida would sustain little damage. Hills said shallow water on a gently sloping continental shelf would protect the Sunshine State. All except Miami, which lies on a deep bay that would suddenly rise up and wash away the city.

Across the Atlantic, the coasts of France, Portugal and part of Spain would be drowned. England, protected by a shallow waters,

would be little affected.

A Pacific Ocean asteroid strike midway between Hawaii and San Francisco would launch an ocean wave that would roll over much of Honolulu and flood the Los Angeles basin, bisecting Santa Catalina Island. Across the Pacific, such a wave would wash away coastal cities and towns in Japan, a country that already has lost thousands of lives to tidal waves, or tsunamis, caused by earthquakes.

Hills estimated on the basis of his studies that an asteroid more than 600 feet in diameter will strike one of the Earth's oceans at least once every 3,000 to 5,000 years. If a person lives for 100 years, then there is about one chance in 50 of being alive when an asteroid tidal wave occurs, he said.

Hills said geologists have found evidence of such occurrences in the past. The impact of an asteroid several miles in diameter is thought to have helped wipe out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.

In Hawaii, geologists have found ocean coral deposited on a hillside 90,000 years ago by a tsunami that may have been 1,000 feet high.

Hills said that if an asteroid ocean strike were detected, people would have no more than three hours' warning before the mountain of water traveling hundreds of miles an hour rolled over land.

Astronomical satellites possibly could detect an approaching asteroid, said Hills, but current technology could not prevent Earth from being smashed.

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