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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Asteroids!

From: **Mitch Battros** <earthcng@earthlink.net>
Date: Wed, 24 Feb 1999 09:48:49 -0800
Fwd Date: Wed, 24 Feb 1999 17:54:33 -0500
Subject: Asteroids!

Caution folks, this article is a bit scary, but true. This could be the explanation for the sharp increase in Fireball sightings. Has NASA, as well as other government officials, been less than forthcoming with what they know concerning Asteroids.

Mitch Battros

Cosmic rocks ganging up on Earth...02/24/99

Seth Borenstein Herald Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- A dangerous asteroid will whiz by Earth today in a cosmic close call. Similar near misses are expected March 2, 18, 26 and April 1.

Astronomers are discovering potential killer asteroids at a record pace.

The public's flirtation last year with fear of menacing space rocks -- fueled by two fictionalized movies and one widely reported threat -- has faded. But astronomers scanning the sky with new technology are finding more asteroids than ever.

There are almost weekly additions to science's official list of "potentially hazardous asteroids." In 1998, scientists found 55 of the would-be killers -- more than in the previous six years combined. Now the all-time list is at 163 and growing.

None of these rocks is expected to hit Earth directly. But they are too close for comfort.

"It's crazy," said University of Arizona astronomer Tim Spahr, scientist for one of three teams of sky searchers. "It's not even active, it's just insane."

Caution, read with care!!!!

Here are a few recent examples:

This afternoon, a half-mile-wide asteroid discovered in January will whiz by Earth at a distance of 3.4 million miles. That rock, called 1999 BJ8, is expected to give Earth its closest call in the next 22 months, according to the ever-changing list of dangerous objects.

On Feb. 4, 30-foot-wide rock came incredibly close to Earth. It was only 632,000 miles away (2 1/2 times the distance from

here to the moon), and scientists didn't notice until it had already passed and was moving away.

For a few brief hours Feb.16, it looked as if a two-thirds-of-a-mile-long asteroid discovered in January could come even closer than that -- maybe even hit us in 2066 or 2073. But new photographs showed that the rock with an unusual orbit would be close, but not that close.

The biggest reason that astronomers are finding more of these near-miss asteroids is the redirection of Air Force technology from tracking killer satellites to spotting killer rocks.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Lincoln Laboratory, a federally funded national security research center outside Boston, changed the asteroid tracking world last March when it began using Air Force technology to scan the sky with a telescope based in New Mexico. The lab's program, called LINEAR, has found 38 of the last 59 asteroids.

"We have it down to a point where we're in a groove," LINEAR chief Grant Stokes said.

But even as new threats are being found much more frequently than before, "we're way behind," said Don Yeomans, manager of NASA's Near Earth Object program.

That's because last year, NASA set a goal of finding most potential asteroid threats within 10 years. Asteroids are considered a threat if they are bigger than half a mile wide and are going to come within five million miles of Earth.

Astronomers guess there are 2,000 such asteroids out there, and so far they have found about 8 percent of them. So even though the number of asteroids being found is soaring, it's not growing fast enough, experts said.

NASA, which spends \$3.5 million a year on asteroid tracking, is speeding up the process. A second LINEAR program goes on-line this spring. With a second LINEAR, astronomers should find 90 percent of those killer rocks in about 16 or 17 years.

The last time a big asteroid hit was 65 million years ago. That was the asteroid that landed in the Yucatan and is thought to have wiped out the dinosaurs.

Of course, there are millions of others that could cause major disasters, like a 150-foot-wide one that exploded over Tunguska, Siberia, in 1908 and leveled thousands of square miles of forests.

"If you were going to find every object that's going to threaten the Earth with a Tunguska, you're talking millions, not thousands." said researcher Jeff Larsen of the University of Arizona's Spacewatch tracking program.

Mitch Battros
Producer - Earth Changes TV

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