

# Latvian experts say meteorite crater was hoax (Update)

October 26 2009

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(AP) -- Scientists investigating a large crater initially believed to have been caused by a meteorite said a closer analysis Monday revealed it was a hoax.

Experts in the Baltic country rushed to the site after reports that a meteorite-like object had crashed late Sunday in the Mazsalaca region near the Estonian border.

"This is not a real crater. It is artificial," Uldis Nulle, a scientist at the Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Center, said after inspecting the site on Monday.

Earlier Uldis had said his first impression late Sunday was that the 27-foot (nine-meter) wide and nine foot (three-meter) deep crater had been caused by a [meteorite](#). He said there was smoke coming out of the hole when he arrived.

Uldis and other experts who examined the hole in daylight on Monday said it was too tidy to have been caused by a meteorite.

"It's artificial, dug by shovel," said Girts Stinkulis, a geologist at the University of Latvia.

Dainis Ozols, a nature conservationist, said he believes someone dug the hole and tried to make it look like a meteorite crater by burning some pyrotechnic compound at the bottom. He added he would analyze some

samples taken from the site.

Sigita Pildava, a spokeswoman for the State Police, said it wasn't immediately clear whether police would open an investigation into the hoax.

Inga Vetere of the Fire and Rescue Service said they received a call about the alleged meteorite on Sunday evening from an eyewitness. She said a military unit was dispatched to the site and found that radiation levels were normal.

Experts outside Latvia said it would be unusual for such a large meteorite to hit the Earth. The planet is constantly bombarded with objects from [outer space](#), but most burn up in the atmosphere and never reach the surface.

In 2007, a meteorite crashed near Lake Titicaca in Peru, causing a crater about 40 feet (12 meters) wide and 15 feet (five meters) deep.

Asta Pellinen-Wannberg, a meteorite expert at the Swedish Institute of Space Research, said she didn't know the details of the Latvian incident, but that a rock would have to be at least three feet (one meter) in diameter to create a hole that size.

Henning Haack, a lecturer at Copenhagen University's Geological Museum, said when it comes to alleged meteorite crashes, "there always is a pretty large margin of error."

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Citation: Latvian experts say meteorite crater was hoax (Update) (2009, October 26) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-10-latvian-experts-meteorite-crater-hoax.html>

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