

Big asteroid to make close, harmless zip by Earth

November 8 2011

An asteroid the size of an aircraft carrier is set to make a close but harmless swing by Earth on Tuesday.

Scientists at NASA's Near-Earth Object Program, which tracks asteroids and comets, ruled out any chance of impact. They're using the close encounter to learn more about the [space rock](#) known as 2005 YU55.

The last time a cosmic interloper this size came this close to Earth was in 1976 and it won't happen again until 2028.

Since late last week, antennas at the space agency's [Deep Space Network](#) in California have been monitoring the quarter-mile-wide asteroid as it approaches from the direction of the sun.

The [Arecibo Observatory](#) in Puerto Rico planned a viewing Tuesday when the asteroid is set to make its closest pass at a distance of 202,000 miles at 6:28 p.m. EST.

Researchers will analyze [radar images](#) to glean details about the asteroid's surface features and shape.

Since its discovery six years ago by a University of Arizona astronomer, scientists have learned a great deal about 2005 YU55. Its surface is coal black, and it spins slowly through space.

Amateur skygazers who want a glimpse need two things: a good sky

chart and a 6-inch telescope or larger since the asteroid is too faint to detect with the naked eye. Even with a telescope, sighting is not guaranteed. The glare from the moon may make the asteroid difficult to spot.

More information: NASA's Near-Earth Object Program:
<http://neo.jpl.nasa.gov>

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