

Bright streak of light reported over California

February 17 2013

(AP)—Hours after a meteor exploded over Russia and injured more than 1,000 people and an asteroid passed relatively close to Earth, residents in California reported seeing an unusual flash of light over the San Francisco Bay area that left many startled and thrilled.

Based on reports, the light streaking in the Northern California sky was a sporadic meteor, or [fireball](#), and not a major event, said Mike Hankey, operations manager for the American Meteor Society in Genesee, New York. The group recorded at least 35 reports of the event, he said.

"Fireballs happen every single night, all around the world," he said.

Experts say smaller meteorites hit earth five to 10 times a year but chances of a large meteor passing, such as the one that streaked over Chelyabinsk, Russia, are much rarer. Another meteor landed in the Bay Area in October and caused a loud sonic boom, a sound that could have been from the meteor traveling faster than the speed of sound, officials said at the time.

Another meteor that exploded April 22 was seen over a large part of Northern California and Nevada.

On Friday, the Chabot Space and Science Center in Oakland also reported receiving calls describing what appeared to be a fireball flying west around 8 p.m.

Jonathan Braidman, an instructor at the center, described the object based off reports as likely being a small piece of an asteroid that "somehow" got on a collision course with the earth.

"This is a very common occurrence," Braidman said. "What is uncommon is that it's so close to where people are living."

Bay Area media outlets reported the fireball was reported seen from an area stretching from Gilroy, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) south of San Francisco, to Sacramento, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) to the northeast.

One viewer told television station NBC11 the object appeared bluish in color and appeared to be heading straight to the ground. San Leandro resident Krizstofor Loid told KTVU-TV that he was sitting on a lawn chair in the backyard of his home when he saw the object.

"I saw, like, a blue streak from the sky coming down. I thought it was fireworks, but I didn't hear any sounds," he said.

The center's large telescopes did not pick up the object during a stargazing event, astronomer Gerald McKeegan told KGO-TV.

"The media attention on the Russian thing got people's attention, so they're more likely to notice things in the sky," Hankey said.

While Friday night's fireball received a lot of attention in the [San Francisco Bay area](#), Braidman notes that about 15,000 tons of debris from asteroids enter the earth's atmosphere every year.

"Usually these things break up into small pieces and are difficult to find," he said.

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