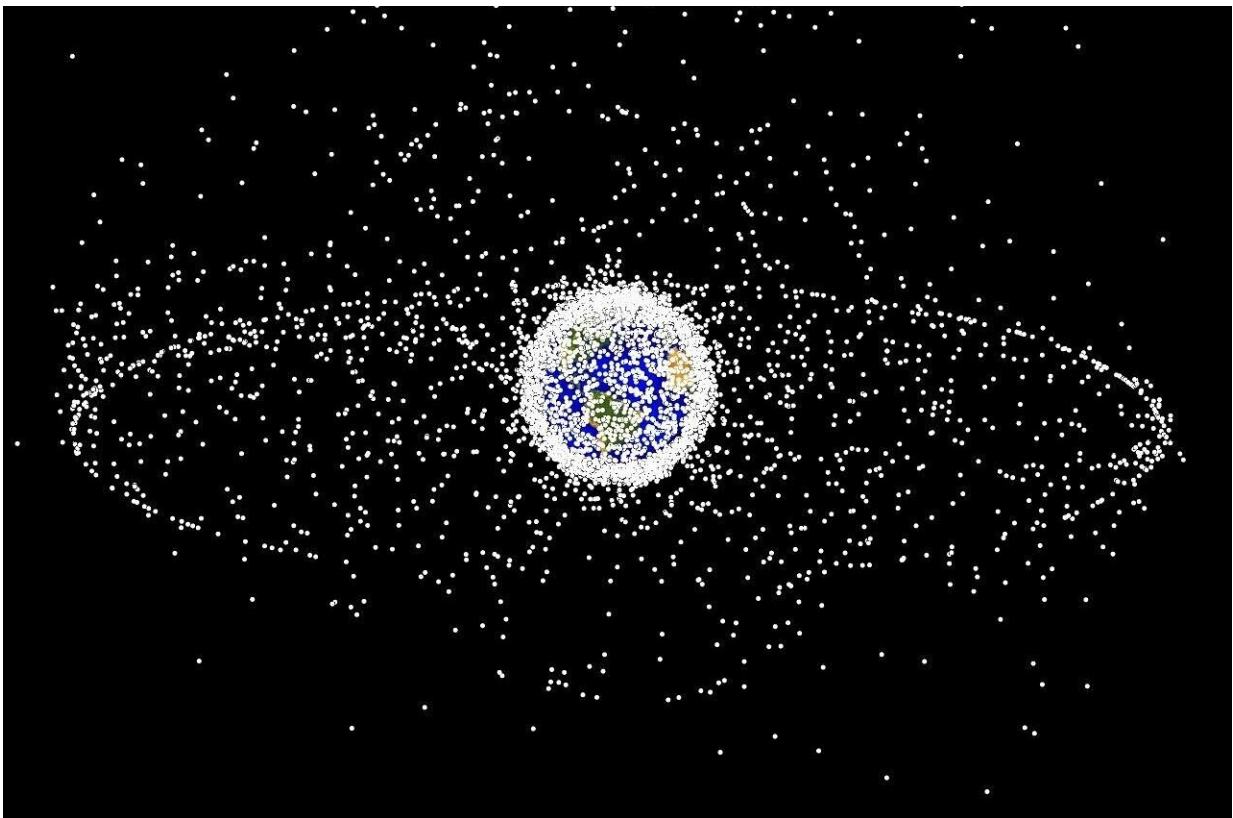


Uncontrolled debris from Chinese space rocket could crash back to Earth as soon as Saturday

July 28 2022, by Orlando Mayorquin



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Uncontrolled debris from a Chinese rocket could come crashing back to Earth as soon as Saturday, according to The Aerospace Corporation, a

federally-funded space research center that tracks orbital debris reentry.

China launched a new laboratory module called the Wentian for its Tiangong space station from Hainan Island in the South China Sea earlier this week. The [rocket](#) carrying the module, the Long March 5B, will make an uncontrolled reentry.

This isn't the first time rocket debris from China's space program has plunged through the atmosphere with an air of suspense.

In May 2021, the world watched with uncertainty as it tried to determine where the remains of a rocket of the same class carrying the initial module for the Tiangong space station would crash.

After days of tense monitoring by scientists and various agencies, including United States Space Command, the rocket reentered the atmosphere over the Indian Ocean.

Now, a replica situation is at hand.

The rocket, China's largest, measures roughly 175 feet and weighs 23 metric tons, according to the Aerospace Corporation. It is much too early to tell exactly where it will fall.

U.S. Space Command said in a statement that last year's rocket reentry location could not be "pinpointed until within hours of its reentry." An agency spokesperson told CNN, it is monitoring [space debris](#) from this week's launch.

But experts emphasize the risk to people generally, and to the United States, is extremely low.

"We estimate that basically only 3% of the ground track is over the

U.S.," said Lael Woods, a director at The Aerospace Corporation.

Generally, space agencies try to guide the reentry of rockets over a certain size to ensure they land somewhere that poses no threat to people, according Marlon Sorge, director of the Aerospace Corporation's Center for Orbital and Reentry Debris Studies.

If an object has a 1 in 10,000 chance of impacting an area where it could hurt somebody, NASA will try to control its reentry, Sorge told U.S. TODAY.

"It's fundamentally a low-risk thing, but it's way higher than it ought to be. It's 10 times higher than our thresholds," Ted Muelhaupt, a reentry debris expert working with the Aerospace Corporation, told U.S. TODAY on Wednesday.

"But the fact that we're having this conversation; the fact that people are out there tracking it ... watching it ... is an unnecessary thing. Even if nothing happens, people being ready in case something happens has costs."

NASA has rebuked China's space agency in the past for its allowance of uncontrolled reentries.

"It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their [space](#) debris," said NASA administrator Bill Nelson in a statement following the reentry of last year's rocket debris.

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