Most space rocks are too small to pose a threat to Earth. But large rocks may be a problem.

Attack From Outer Space!

Can a giant space rock destroy life on Earth?

By Inez Prieto

February 15, 2013, started like any other day in Chelyabinsk, Russia. Many adults were driving to work, while school children were preparing for their first class of the day. Suddenly, a large space rock measuring

50 feet wide soared across the sky. The rock was traveling at a speed of 41,600 miles per hour. People stopped what they were doing to stare at the sight in shock. Within seconds, the rock exploded, setting off car alarms and causing windows and television screens to shatter.

Fortunately, no one was killed, but more than 1,000 people were injured by the blast.

Coincidentally, that same day, another space rock was hurling past Earth. However, this one was much bigger—measuring half the size of a football field. Scientists had already predicted the path of this rock, and knew it would not strike the planet. Fortunately, they were correct.

Still, the events of the day left many people shaken—and wondering: What if a giant space rock did strike Earth?

Severe Strike

According to scientist Mike Shara, the effects would be terrifying. "Not only would this rock create a giant crater at the impact site, but it would blow billions of boulders out of the ground," says Shara. "These boulders would be crashing down on Earth for days."

And if the rock landed in the ocean? “It would create a tsunami—a series of waves—so great that it could wipe out coastal cities,” said Shara.

In 2013, people in Chelyabinsk, Russia, saw this space rock zip across the sky.

Tracking Trouble

But according to Shara, events like this are very rare. They may happen once every 100 million years. In addition, scientists are doing everything they can to prevent a disaster like this from happening.

NASA is currently exploring ways to deflect large space rocks that may one day collide with Earth. In addition, a group of astronauts recently formed a group called B612 Foundation. Their mission? To identify and track large rocks that may be heading toward Earth.

“There’s no reason to panic,” says Diane Murphy, a member of B612. “If we identify the object ahead of time we can—at the very least—evacuate people in areas that would be affected by the crash.”

p. 1: © Mopic/Shutterstock; p. 3tr: © Itar-Tass/ABACA/Newscom