

Cause for Concern? Giant Asteroid Strikes Earth With Little Warning

An asteroid took astronomers by surprise recently, hitting Earth's atmosphere just two hours after it was first detected by scientists. Thankfully, the stone wasn't big enough to cause a major catastrophe on Earth.

The refrigerator-sized cosmic rock, named 2022 EB5, is only the fifth asteroid spotted right before hitting the planet and is the first sighting of its kind since 2019.

Last week, astronomer Krisztian Sarneczky noticed the asteroid while viewing space from the Piszkestető Mountain Station in Northern Hungary. Sarneczky reported the sighting to the International Astronomical Union's Minor Planet Center.

According to NASA, the "Scout" system, which constantly searches a database for potential asteroid impacts, was immediately tasked with following this last-minute event, predicting it would likely hit a remote Norwegian island, 300 miles northeast of Iceland.

The cosmic rock came down at about 39,600 mph and most likely exploded, EarthSky reports.

"Scout had only 14 observations over 40 minutes from one observatory to work with when it first identified the object as an impactor. We were able to determine the possible impact locations, which initially extended from western Greenland to off the coast of Norway," said Davide Farnocchia, a navigation engineer who developed Scout. "As more observatories tracked the asteroid, our calculations of its trajectory and impact location became more precise."

Researchers say because of the speed the rock was traveling it was probably about one-third of the distance between Earth and the moon when it was first spotted.

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