



Written by [James Heiser](#) on September 26, 2011

NASA's Fallen Satellite Highlights Human Fears

UARS' function was to study the ozone layer of Earth's atmosphere. The satellite's mission was only supposed to last for three years, but — with a longevity strikingly similar to that of NASA's Mars landers — UARS continued to function over a decade after the conclusion of its scheduled mission. When the Bush administration reduced funding for the [Earth Science Enterprise](#), the UARS was officially decommissioned, and the satellite was dropped from its higher orbit in December 2005. It was this final burn that led to the UARS' fall from space nearly six years later.



According to press reports, the satellite harmlessly dropped into the Pacific Ocean. [FoxNews noted](#):

The bus-sized satellite first penetrated Earth's atmosphere somewhere over the Pacific Ocean, according to NASA and the U.S. Air Force's Joint Space Operations Center. But that doesn't necessarily mean it all fell into the sea.

NASA's earlier calculations had predicted that the 20-year-old former climate research satellite would fall over a 500-mile swath and could include land.

Because the plummet began over the ocean and given the lack of any reports of people being hit, that "gives us a good feeling that no one was hurt," but officials didn't know for certain, NASA spokesman Steve Cole told The Associated Press.

The two government agencies said the 35-foot satellite fell sometime between 11:23 p.m. EDT Friday and 1:09 a.m. EDT Saturday, but with no precise time or location.

While media reports emphasized the large size of the UARS, the risk of significant damage to property or loss of human life was actually vanishingly small. The only thing more pretentious than the media's obsession with casting the fall of UARS in almost-apocalyptic terms was the government's fussiness over fragments of their abandoned satellite. [As reported by the San Francisco Chronicle](#), NASA was very quick to assert some rather novel notions of its claim to space junk: "NASA urges anyone who thinks they've found satellite debris to call police. It's government property and illegal to keep it or try to sell it. The debris has no toxic contamination, but there could be sharp edges, NASA officials have said."

Undoubtedly anyone who had just avoided being hit by a piece of satellite crashing to Earth should be warned about its potential for "sharp edges" — but the government's decision to send UARS plummeting into the atmosphere on an unknown trajectory sounds like the very definition of abandonment of property. The notion that the killjoys at NASA would insist on trying to pry fragments of their abandoned property from the hands people who had nearly become victims of their reckless practices for de-orbiting satellites is lost somewhere between humorous and positively insulting.

While the press was lost in paroxysms of worry about the threat to life and limb posed by NASA's



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plummeting satellite, a more worthy source of concern received far less notice: a sudden increase in massive flares from sunspots. Unlike the minuscule threat posed by a single satellite, a series of strong M- and X-class flares have erupted for several days — and given the ability of such flares to interfere with radio communications and the delivery of electrical power, if one wanted to "worry" about a significant "threat" from outer space in recent days, [sunspot AR1302](#) would seem a more worthy target for concern.

Actually, both the fall of UARS and the flares from AR1302 demonstrate the fact that many things transpire in the heavens that are beyond the control of mankind. UARS fell to Earth because of a deliberate decision to de-orbit the satellite — but many meteorites fall daily, and objects vastly larger than UARS could easily arrive on any given day. Solar flares are obviously completely beyond mankind's ability to control or mitigate. But for a civilization seemingly obsessed with its own power — even to the point of engaging in the collective delusion that resides in the theory of manmade climate change — a brief indulging of the fantasy of "killer satellites" falling on our heads is permitted to slip the bonds of science fiction and enter the front page headlines.

What is inconceivable to modern man is that nature itself — from the climate, to the sun, to the "space junk" that can rain down at any moment — is beyond our control. It is this lack of control that truly terrifies the modern mind.



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