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NORAD looking for Russian rocket in Wyoming

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colorado (AP) -- A spent Russian booster rocket re-entered the atmosphere Thursday over Colorado and Wyoming, the North American Aerospace Defense Command said.

NORAD spokesman Sean Kelly said the agency was trying to confirm a report that a piece of the rocket may have hit the ground near Riverton, Wyoming, at about 6 a.m.

Kelly said military personnel had not yet reached the scene.

No damage was reported and the debris was not believed to be hazardous, NORAD said.

Eyewitnesses reported seeing flaming objects in the sky at the time the rocket was re-entering, Kelly said.

"It was pretty spectacular," said Riverton Police Capt. Mark Stone, who said he saw the burning object while he was retrieving his newspaper. "My first concern is that we had some sort of aircraft that was coming down. It was definitely leaving a burning debris trail behind it."

He said he could tell it was a fairly large object, but it was too high to determine what it was.

A trooper found a 3-by-5 foot area burned in the snow about 35 feet from the edge of the highway, but found no object, Sgt. Stephen Townsend of the Wyoming Highway Patrol said. The highway was closed at the time because of wintry weather, he said.

NORAD identified the rocket as an SL-4 that had been used to launch a French space telescope in December, and Kelly said U.S. spacewatchers knew the rocket was coming down.

"Objects falling from space are almost an everyday occurrence," he said.

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