

Quake, Fireball Give Washington Area Two Jolts

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A fireball flashed across South Sound and the Northwest shortly before 8 p.m. Saturday.

In the Olympia area, the fireball was described as a blazing flash of green or turquoise light with a tail that moved from east to west in the southern sky.



The mystery light was reported as far north as Canada and as far south as Medford, Ore.

Twenty minutes earlier, a small earthquake struck north of Olympia.

The Capital Communications Center, which dispatches emergency calls to fire and law enforcement agencies, was flooded with calls when the fireball first was spotted at 7:55 p.m. The earthquake, however, generated no calls, a dispatcher said.

The quake was centered seven miles south of the Mason County community of Allyn and 12 miles east/northeast of Shelton, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

The magnitude 3.3 earthquake that hit at 7:37 p.m. was in no way related to the fireball, but many people thought it was odd that two somewhat unusual events occurred so close together.

Caryn Kennemore had just picked up her children and returned to her home near the Amtrak station in Lacey when she spotted the fireball.

"It was huge, almost like a green color, a metallicky green," Kennemore said. "It looked just like a shooting star that was really close. ... It was just amazing."

Scientists at the Cascadia Meteorite Laboratory at Portland State University said it's unknown whether the bright light contained a meteorite, which is a chunk of stone or metal from a meteoroid that makes it into the Earth's atmosphere.

But it definitely was a fireball, said Dick Pugh, field scientist at the laboratory.

A fireball is the light produced when meteorites vaporize, and most meteorites begin vaporizing about 85 miles above the Earth, he said. They travel about 50,000 mph and burn up quickly.

"I believe it's a rock from space burning up in the atmosphere," Pugh said. "It's not unusual; we get them about once a month. ... If it's clear, more people see them. I'd say this one was a little larger than most."

The last time such a large fireball was visible in South Sound was early on the morning of June 3.

There were no reports of a sonic boom, Pugh said. "That means it didn't land."

In Oregon, some residents reported the bright light as a flaming object that generated noise that was heard from Salem to Medford.

Summer Jensen of Portland said she was sitting in her living room with her father when she saw the flash of light outside and rushed to see what it was.

"I've never seen anything like that," Jensen said. She added that the object appeared to be moving slowly compared to a typical meteor, or "shooting star."

Observers on the Oregon coast described it as red and noisy. A resident in Seaside, Ore., told Northwest Cable News that she spotted the fireball headed over the ocean.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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