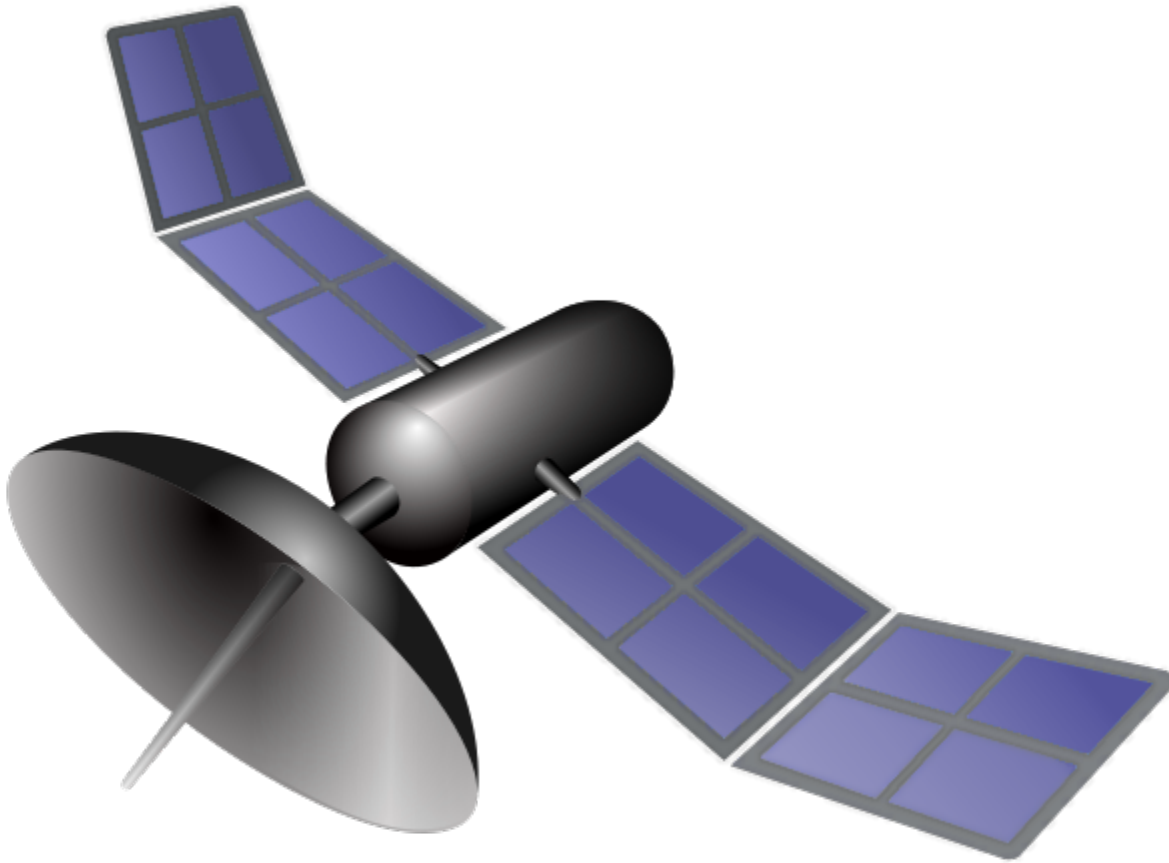


# **Will a discarded Chinese space laboratory crash in the Riverbend? Probably not, but here's what officials say about it**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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ALTON – China's first-ever space laboratory, Tiangong-1, will be plummeting to Earth sometime between now and Monday.

It was launched from Jiuquan, China on Sept. 29, 2011, and is coming to Earth following its service ending and telemetry link being lost on March 21, 2016. Since then, it has been in a slow, uncontrolled roll toward the planet. It is expected to make dawn passes between March 26 – April 3 over much of the United States and southern Canada.

Because of its trajectory, there is a slight chance it could make its arrival in the St. Louis area, as it is within the range of the satellite's possible future landing. As of right now, however, the U.S. Air Force's Space Command is unsure where the former space laboratory may land.

“The Joint Space Operations Center at Vandenberg Air Force Base used Space Surveillance Network sensors and their orbital analysis system to project Tiangong-1's reentry on/around April 1, 2018,” Major Cody Chiles of the U.S. Air Force said in an email Friday afternoon. “We will continue to refine our prediction and ultimately provide more fidelity as the reentry time approaches. This information will be listed in the U.S. Strategic Command's publicly-available website, [www.Space-Track.org](http://www.Space-Track.org).

“There are many factors acting on an object as it decays and reenters the atmosphere,” Major Chiles continued. “These factors include how an object tumbles and breaks up, variations in the gravitational field of a landmass or ocean, solar radiation pressure and atmospheric drag. These factors complicate the ability to predict what happens after reentry occurs; however, accuracy of reentry predictions increases as the reentry event approaches.

“The Joint Force Space Component Command monitors a congested space environment, include tens of thousands of man-made debris pieces, while simultaneously working with our government, international and industry partners to increase space situational awareness.

“By tracking and listing these objects and making that information available, we enable spaceflight safety and increase transparency in the space domain. We will continue to monitor this reentry and provide more information when it is available.”

A request for comment was also sent to NASA, NASA Public Affairs Officer J.D. Harrington sent the following statement regarding the satellite:

*We understand from press accounts and a December 2017 communication from the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations that China's Tiangong-1 space laboratory will re-enter the Earth's atmosphere in early 2018. As this is a Chinese spacecraft, NASA would refer you to the appropriate authorities in China for comment.*

*The U.S. Air Force's Joint Space Operations Center (JSpOC) at Vandenberg AFB in California detects and tracks objects 10 cm and larger in low Earth orbit, and about 1 meter and larger in deep space. JSpOC publishes orbital debris information on a daily basis to [www.space-track.org](http://www.space-track.org).*

If a piece of fallen space debris makes contact with your self or property, the responding body to that would be the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). A request for comment has been sent to FEMA and it has not been answered at this time. One must stress, however, the odds of that happening are nearly impossible, standing at one in billions or even trillions.

There is a halfway decent chance, however, Riverbend residents may see a fiery spectacle of the station reentering Earth's atmosphere and being set ablaze like a meteorite due to atmospheric friction.