

# Fall expected within weeks

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As the re-entry date approaches, the event resembles, more and more, a game of chance with this important difference—even the dealer doesn't know the odds.

"There's no way in hell you can predict where it's going to land," William Bastedo of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration told *U.S. News and World Report* last week.

NASA is betting on the fact that the lab orbits over an area covered by 70 percent ocean, and officials at the agency have estimated the odds against any debris hitting a city at 40-1

The agency has been gingerly pumping up the chances against anyone being killed or injured by falling odds-and-ends from the lab. Original estimates of 55-1 now stand revised at 150-1 against such an occurrence.

But Palmatier thinks the NASA odds game may be a losing proposition.

"It's damned hard to have these odds mean anything," he said. "Probability describes things over a long period of time, and this (re-entry) will only happen once. You may be able to determine a 50-50 probability for heads or tails over 100 tosses of a coin, but the question 'What happens on the next toss?' always remains."

The possibility that Sky Lab could skip off the earth's upper atmosphere, like a stone off water, and re-enter anywhere within the wide belt of its orbit changes the art of forecast to a toss-up; but, clearly, Washington is not gambling.

According to *Newsweek*, the Federal Preparedness Agency has been quietly

coordinating a network of park rangers and Coast Guard personnel to stand watch for the incoming debris. The Pentagon will be on alert to provide help if needed, and the State Department plans to warn any foreign nations that may be in the path of the three-story-house sized space craft—but Canada and Japan have set up Sky Lab watches of their own.

Over the weekend, the Federal Aviation Administration announced it would order all commercial airliners out of the expected area of re-entry.

Sky Lab follows an orbit that criss-crosses in a wide belt from 50 degrees north latitude to 50 degrees south latitude—an area that includes all of the continental United States and 90 percent of the world's population.

The orbit takes it over most of Europe, Asia and South America and over all of Africa and Australia.

While NASA officials are encouraged that Sky Lab's orbit could hardly include more

ocean area, it is also clear that no orbit could carry it over more densely populated areas of the world.

NASA has been criticized lately for allegedly down-playing the seriousness of the Sky Lab's re-entry, and according to *Newsweek* at least one official has resigned in protest over the agency's soft-pedal news policy.

By attempting to avoid creation of widespread panic, NASA is clearly treading on eggs. Critics claim that by stonewalling, the agency is trying to duck criticism and hoping to ride out of a storm that may or may not hit.

Critics have not been dazzled by NASA's statistics or by a recent claim by the agency that in the past two decades nearly 6,000 pieces of space junk have fallen out of orbit.

"So far no one has been hurt," a NASA source told *U.S. News and World Report*.

## Sky Lab damage covered

By BOB WILLINGHAM

For anyone unlucky enough to lose out against the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's projected 150-to-1 odds against personal injury resulting from falling Sky Lab debris this summer, the state insurance commission has good news.

Assistant Deputy Commissioner Fred L. Seaman said in a telephone interview on Tuesday there is "nothing in any life insurance policy to prevent the injured party from collecting," and that the claimant would not have to prove negligence on the part of the Federal Government.

Sky Lab damage is also covered under comprehensive auto insurance policies but not under collision policies.

Seaman said home owner's insurance policies also cover Sky Lab damage under the extended coverage section of the policy.

"This is an extension of fire and lightning coverage which also covers such things like vandalism, smoke and storms."

The coverage also extends to "spacecraft, aircraft, falling aircraft parts, and self-propelled missiles," Seaman said.

Commercial properties are usually limited to coverage against falling objects including falling aircraft parts.

"The argument here would be as to whether the Sky Lab is an aircraft or not," added Seaman.

Seaman stated that the "Act of God" claim by insurance companies for things beyond the control of man would not be favored by the commission.

"We would quarrel with any company that argued this," he said. "Man put this baby up."

The North American Air Defense tentatively estimates Sky Lab's final descent between June 20 and July 14 with the estimated re-entry date (Chicken Little Day) at July 2.

Hundreds of pieces of debris are expected to survive the re-entry, some weighing up to 2 tons.

## Pictures wanted of Sky Lab dive

Have your camera ready! The *Summer Tar Heel* is offering a magnificent reward for the best, authentic photograph of Sky Lab's demise. Photos of terrestrial destruction as a result of Sky Lab's fall are welcome. Evidence of fallen debris also will be considered.

Twenty-five dollars will be given for exclusive rights to the photo selected or a piece of Sky Lab debris submitted. Sorry, debris entrees are limited to two tons.

Sky Lab contest submissions will be accepted at the *Summer Tar Heel* offices in the union.

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