
May-Day! Queen guitarist warns asteroids threaten life on Earth

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In a bid to increase preparedness, experts have designated June 30, 2015, as Asteroid Awareness Day.

"We need all nations to cooperate," said Queen lead guitarist Brian May, who is also an astrophysicist. "This is not just an American problem or a British problem; this is a world problem which is avertable. That's our message."

More than 100 scientists, astronauts and pundits worldwide have signed a declaration calling for a hundredfold increase in the detection and monitoring of asteroids.

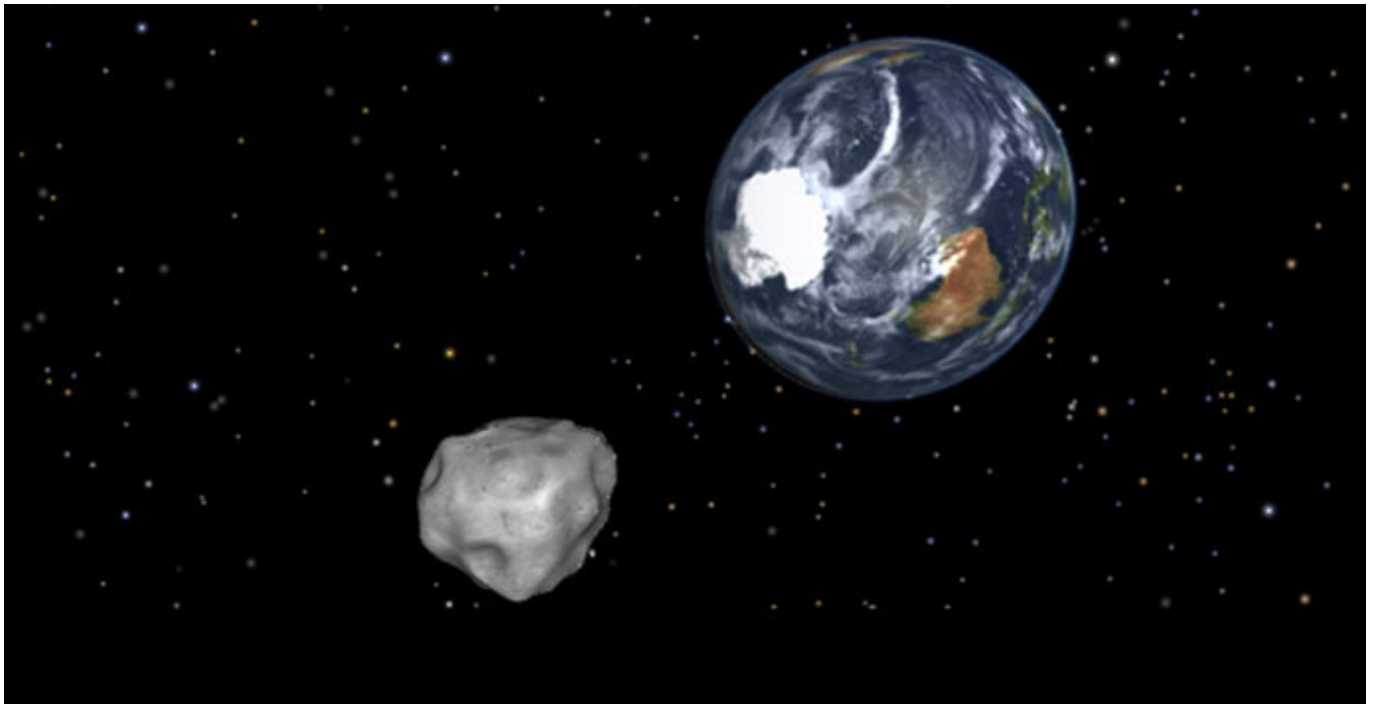
The goal of the campaign is to educate the public worldwide about what asteroids are, how frequently they hit Earth and how humanity can protect itself from potential disasters.

May, Queen's founding member, hosted a press conference at the London Science Museum together with Lord Martin Rees, the UK Royal Astronomer. Lord Rees read the 100x Declaration, which resolves to *"solve humanity's greatest challenges to safeguard our families and quality of life on Earth in the future."*

The Asteroid Day will be held on the anniversary of an asteroid strike in Tunguska, Siberia in 1908, which was hundreds of times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945.

The inbound space rock, some 80 meters across, exploded in the air with the force of a large

hydrogen bomb. The impact destroyed an area of 800 square miles. To put this in perspective, London's urban area is 671 square miles.



The declaration calls for the employment of available technology to detect and track near-Earth asteroids that threaten human populations, a rapid, hundredfold acceleration of the discovery and tracking of near-Earth objects and for better public understanding of the dangers and efforts to prevent future impacts.

"There are a million asteroids in our solar system that have the potential to strike Earth and destroy a city, yet we have discovered less than 10,000 — just one percent — of them. We have the technology to change that situation," the declaration reads.

"The more we learn about asteroid impacts, the clearer it becomes that the human race has been living on borrowed time," May said. *"We are currently aware of less than 1 percent of objects comparable to the one that impacted at Tunguska, and nobody knows when the next big one will hit. It takes just one."*

READ MORE: [556 asteroids size of washing machine hit Earth over past 20 years - NASA report](#)

Campaigners have mooted ideas how to prevent a possible impact.

"If we could predict a future massive impact enough time in advance, it would be possible to apply a small nudge to the asteroid in question which would be sufficient to modify its trajectory so it would miss the Earth," said May.

"We have the technology to deflect dangerous asteroids through kinetic impactors and gravity tractors but only if we have years of advance warning of their trajectories," added Dr. Ed Lu, a former shuttle astronaut and co-founder of the Sentinel Mission.

"Now we need the resolve to go forward. It is the only natural disaster we know how to

prevent.”

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Larger asteroids or comets measuring several kilometers wide will strike Earth approximately every 10 million years, causing destruction on a global scale, experts estimate.

A 10 kilometer-wide space rock that hit the Earth 68 million years ago triggered the mass extinction event that killed off the dinosaurs. The 200 kilometer-wide Chicxulub crater in Mexico can still be seen today.

“An asteroid strike of the kind that wiped out the dinosaurs – more energetic than all the hydrogen bombs in the world exploding simultaneously – is inevitable,” said the author and scientist Richard Dawkins. *“The chance that it will happen in any one person’s lifetime is low but the technology to avert it will take a long time to develop.”*

In February 2013, an 18 meter-wide meteorite hit the Russian city of Chelyabinsk. Its impact injured more than 1,400 people and damaged 7,000 buildings. The incident renewed calls for early warning systems for incoming rocks from space.

However, budget cuts at NASA, announced in April, put an end to most asteroid research for the time being.
