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In the sky! A bird? A plane? A ... UF...

Chicago Tribune
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UFO spotted over O'Hare Airport 02:01

GETTING AROUND

CHICAGO TRIBUNE NEWSROOM CLTV DAK BROOK

UFO SPOTTED OVER O'HARE AIRPORT
UFO's are sighted over O'Hare International Airport by airport employees. The Chicago Tribune's Jon Hillekitch tells CLTV's Jim Wagner about it on January 1, 2007.

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The databases of various UFO-watching groups are full of accounts filed by pilots about sightings of unknown aircraft and anomalies that affected navigational equipment onboard planes.

Whether any of the UFO incidents are real or merely the result of individual perceptions, some experts say the events pose a potential safety risk to pilots and their passengers.

"There have been documented cases where safety appears to have been implicated, and more and more we are coming to the point of view that we are dealing with an intelligent phenomenon," said Richard Haines, science director at the National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena, a private agency.

"We must be proactive before an aircraft goes down," said Haines, a former chief of the Space Human Factors Office at [NASA's](#) Ames Research Center.

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Haines is investigating the O'Hare incident. He said he has determined that no weather balloons were launched in the vicinity of O'Hare on Nov. 7.

"It's absurd that the military would be conducting aerial test flights" near the airport, Haines said.

All the witnesses to the O'Hare event, who included at least several pilots, said they are certain based on the disc's appearance and flight characteristics that it was not an airplane, helicopter, weather balloon or any other craft known to man.

United denies UFO report

They're not sure what was hanging out for several minutes in the restricted airspace, but they are upset that no one in power has taken the matter seriously.

A United spokeswoman said there is no record of the UFO report. She

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said United officials do not recall discussion of any such incident.

"There's nothing in the duty manager log, which is used to report unusual incidents," said United spokeswoman Megan McCarthy. "I checked around. There's no record of anything."

The pilots of the United plane being directed back from Gate C17 also were notified by United personnel of the sighting, and one of the pilots reportedly opened a windshield in the cockpit to get a better view of the object estimated to be hovering 1,500 feet above the ground.

The object was seen to suddenly accelerate straight up through the solid overcast skies, which the FAA reported had 1,900-foot cloud ceilings at the time.

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"It was like somebody punched a hole in the sky," said one United employee.

Witnesses said they had a hard time visually tracking the object as it streaked through the dense clouds.

It left behind an open hole of clear air in the cloud layer, the witnesses said, adding that the hole disappeared within a few minutes.

The United employees interviewed by the Tribune spoke on condition of anonymity.

Some said they were interviewed by United officials and instructed to write reports and draw pictures of what they observed, and that they were advised by United officials to refrain from speaking about what they saw.

Federal agency backtracks

Like United, the FAA originally told the Tribune that it had no information on the alleged UFO sighting. But the federal agency quickly reversed its position after the newspaper filed a Freedom of Information Act request.

An internal FAA review of air-traffic communications tapes, a step toward complying with the Tribune request, turned up the call by the United supervisor to an FAA manager in the airport tower, Cory said.

Cory said the weather might have factored into what the witnesses thought they saw.

"Our theory on this is that it was a weather phenomenon," she said. "That night was a perfect atmospheric condition in terms of low [cloud] ceiling and a lot of airport lights. When the lights shine up into the clouds, sometimes you can see funny things. That's our take on it."

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