

# UH launching new project to look for space objects

*Scientists say it would have detected Russian meteor*

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## HONOLULU -

The meteor that fell in Russia Friday was about one-third the size of a passing asteroid just hours later, according to experts, who said that made it hard to detect.

But scientists at the University of Hawaii are trying to change that.

The Institute for Astronomy's Panoramic Survey Telescope and Rapid Response System, or Pan-STARRS, has been scanning the sky for "killer asteroids" over the past four years now.

It's very powerful, but has its restrictions.

"Pan-STARRS is a big telescope that looks kind of like a pencil, so we can't cover the whole sky every night," said Richard Wainscoat of the UH Institute for Astronomy.

And experts said that's probably why it missed the Russian meteorite.

To fill that void, scientists at UH are starting up the Asteroid Terrestrial-impact Last Alert System, or ATLAS, which can't see objects as far away as Pan-STARRS but can scan the whole sky multiple times a night.

ATLAS principal investigator John Tonry said, "What ATLAS is designed to do is build new telescopes that have very wide fields of view, but at the same time are very sensitive.

"We think it would have had enough sensitivity to have seen this thing (Russian meteorite) with about a day's worth of warning."

The program is being funded by NASA and is scheduled to be fully operational by the end of 2015.

So what can we do if scientists do discover an object heading straight for Earth?

Wainscoat said, "Most of the scenarios usually involve bombs to blow them up or to deflect them or something like that."