

Elon Musk's Satellites Now Constantly Falling Out of the Sky

Look out!

By [Frank Landymore](#)

Elon Musk's race to dominate our planet's orbit with his satellite constellations is creating [tons of space junk](#) — enough of it, in fact, that we might want to start looking up.

According to storied Smithsonian astrophysicist [Jonathan McDowell](#), there are now one or two of these Starlink satellites falling back to Earth every single day, [he recently told *EarthSky*](#). And that figure, McDowell warned, is only going to keep climbing.

The alarming statistic underscores the concerns around rapidly populating the planet's Low Earth Orbit with expendable satellites. Musk's SpaceX has been launching thousands of them up there using his reusable rockets since 2019, with more than 8,000 currently in operation.

With those efforts accelerating in recent years, SpaceX has [launched more than 2,000 satellites in 2025 alone](#). Meanwhile, its competitors are rushing to catch up with their own satellite-based internet service, with Amazon kickstarting its plan to deploy more than 3,200 with its first batch launched [earlier this year](#).

“With all constellations deployed, we expect about 30,000 low-Earth orbit satellites (Starlink, Amazon Kuiper, others) and perhaps another 20,000 satellites at 1,000 km [620 miles] from the Chinese systems,” McDowell told *EarthSky*.

Low Earth Orbit's rapidly getting more crowded, in other words, and that means a lot of satellite casualties. One of the reasons they're occurring so frequently is that Starlink's satellites have a short lifespan of around five years. After this, they're guided towards the Earth, where they're supposed to burn up upon re-entering the atmosphere.

All those cremated satellites have scientists concerned about the pollution they're causing by releasing metals into the stratosphere, with [one study](#) speculating that it could kick off a chain reaction that devastates the ozone layer.

“So far answers have ranged from ‘this is too small to be a problem’ to ‘we’re already screwed,’” McDowell [told *The Register*](#). “But the uncertainty is large enough that there’s already a possibility we’re damaging the upper atmosphere.”

And atmospheric pollution may soon be the least of our worries. In a [2023 report](#), the Federal Aviation Administration warned that by 2035, some 28,000 fragments from Starlink satellites could survive re-entry each year, skyrocketing the chance of someone on the ground getting struck and killed by space debris — once considered an astronomical improbability — to a staggering 61 percent each year.

As it stands, the Earth's on track to be bombarded by five satellite re-entries per day in the near future, McDowell warned. But that's not even the worst case scenario. McDowell fears that if satellite constellations become too crowded, it could host a disastrous chain reaction called Kessler syndrome, in which a few collisions between satellites cascade out of control and create even more space debris, potentially trapping humankind below a whirling vortex of orbital shrapnel. SpaceX's satellites are low enough that it's unlikely they'd survive the amount of time needed for this cascade to happen, but its dominance there may force competitors to higher orbits where their craft could take decades, if not centuries, to de-orbit.

And what if a whole swathe of satellites get wiped out by a solar storm all at once? It's not an impossibility, as research has shown that the satellites were [falling out of the sky more frequently](#) during a period of volatile solar activity called the solar maximum. All told, we've reached a point where we can no longer brush the space junk problem under the rug.

More on satellites: [*Elon Musk Is Furious That People Are Launching So Many Satellites, Even Though He's Personally Responsible for 60 Percent of All Satellites Currently in Space*](#)