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March 18, 2009

Just two weeks after [Near Earth Object 2009](#)

[DD45](#) buzzed the Earth at a distance of only 40,000 miles, another sizable space rock, designated 2009 FH, passed nearly as close.

According to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's NEO Program the object came closest to the Earth at 5:17am Pacific time (12:17 Universal Time) on Wednesday, March 18, 2009, passing at a distance of 79,000 kilometers (49,000 miles) above the surface.

For comparison, the average distance of the [Moon](#) is nearly five times as great, at 384,000 kilometers. Communications satellites, which travel in geostationary orbits, are positioned at an altitude of 36,000 kilometers, or half the closest pass of 2009 FH.

Estimated at around 15 meters in diameter 2009 FH is approximately half the size of 2009 DD45. Both space rocks are in orbits around the Sun that intersect the Earth's own, suggesting that they will visit our planet again in the future.

2009 FH was first detected by Rik Hill of the Catalina Sky Survey in the Catalina Mountains in Arizona. Follow-up observations took place from observatories in Charleston, Illinois; Socorro, New Mexico; Tucson, Arizona; and Wrightwood, California. Three past recipients of The Planetary Society's Shoemaker Grants were involved in the discovery and tracking, including 2002 recipient Richard Kowalski of the Catalina Sky Survey, 2007 recipients Robert Holmes of the Astronomical Research Institute in Illinois, and James McGaha of the Sabino Canyon Observatory near Tucson, Arizona.

"The asteroid flyby will be a good viewing opportunity for both professional and amateur astronomers" said Don Yeomans of NASA's Near Earth Objects Office at JPL. "The object poses no risk of impact to Earth now or for the foreseeable future."

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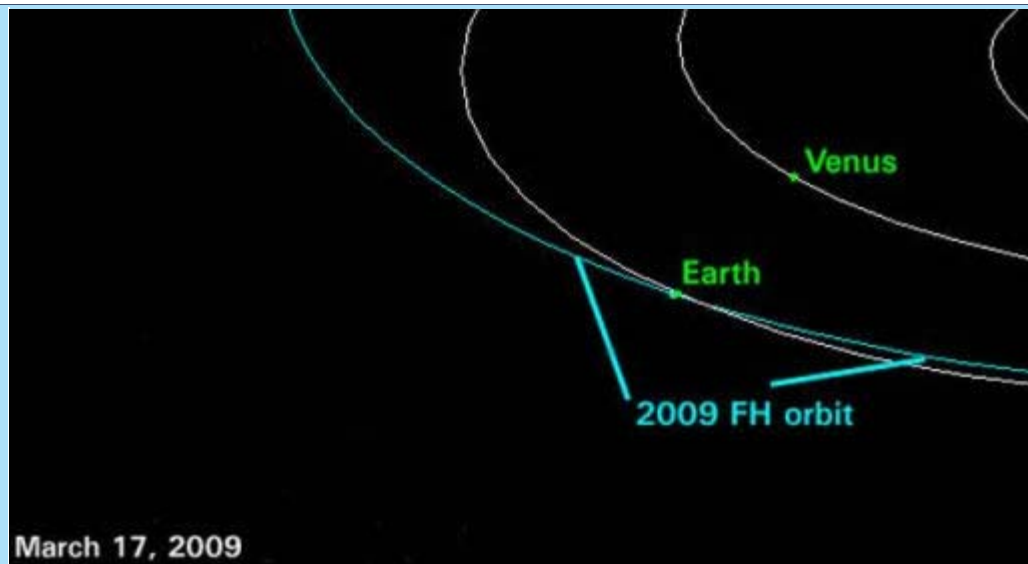
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2009 FH

The Near Earth Object 2009 FH approached to within 79,000 kilometers of Earth's surface on March 18, 2009. Credit: NASA/JPL

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