

Legality of Selling Meteorite Fragments Unclear

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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There was confusion Tuesday over the legality of selling fragments of the meteorite that fell over Chelyabinsk on Friday, prices for which have ranged from 10,000 rubles (\$330) to a whopping 500,000 rubles.

By Russian law, “fragments” valuable to science are considered state property and stealing them is punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to 500,000 rubles. According to state-run news portal Vesti.ru, this law applies to meteorite fragments.

But regional police head Vladimir Skalunov told Interfax that vendors would only be pursued by police for attempting to pass off regular rocks or metal as meteorite fragments and that people would not be stopped from selling authentic pieces of space rock.

“If it really is a meteorite, then it's a find and there will be no consequences for a citizen when selling it,” Skalunov said. “But if it's a rock, or some kind of metal item, then this constitutes

fraud.”

A Chelyabinsk region police spokesman told Itar-Tass that police had confiscated several meteor fragments from local residents who were selling them on the Internet to check whether they were harmful to human health.

Residents pocketing the fragments or attempting to earn off their finds are angering researchers, who say they are valuable to science, Gazeta.ru reported Tuesday.

While the meteor chunks are not hazardous for people, they are "absolutely essential" for Russian scientists, said Viktor Grokhovsky, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences' commission for meteorites and the International Meteorite Society.

Scientists overseas are also asking for permission to study the fragments, Grokhovsky said.

The meteorite that crashed Friday weighed about 10,000 tons, with a 17-meter diameter. It disintegrated after entering the Earth's atmosphere and exploded above the Chelyabinsk region. The force from the shock wave shattered windows and damaged buildings, injuring about 1,500 people and causing 1 billion rubles (\$33 million) worth of damage.

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