

LIGHTNING DATA CENTER MINUTES
July 13, 2012
ST. ANTHONY HOSPITAL, LAKEWOOD, CO

Monthly Quote: "Thunder is good, thunder is impressive; but it is lightning that does the work." -Mark Twain, letter, August 28, 1908

1. The meeting began at 12:04 PM and adjourned at 1:07 PM. Members present: Claus, Elder, Gift, Langford, Nibbe, Wachtel, Wells, and Yarnell. Langford moderated the meeting.
2. Ken Langford began the meeting with a series of news stories of lightning activity on the 4th of July in New England. Each incident is listed below. Citations are included in the "Lightning in the News" section.
3. Incident #1: A couple were struck and injured while watching fireworks in Thomas Park, Dorchester Heights, South Boston, Massachusetts on 7/4/12. The park had earlier been evacuated due to the storm threat, but then re-opened. Witnesses said lightning struck a tree and then struck the couple. The description sounds like this was a side flash. Witnesses described several colors associated with the flash. Our group discussed reasons for the colored appearance, which may include lightning overloading the retina because the iris cannot adjust quickly enough to the sudden change in brightness, and after-image. Ken showed stills from a YouTube video of the event. The flash itself is out of frame to the left of the camera, but the clip does give an excellent sample of what to look for in an authentic lightning strike video. An interesting side note to this report is that one of the web links listed below includes "john-jensenius-richard-kithil" in the text string of the link, despite the fact that their names do not appear in the news report.
4. Incident #2: Lightning caused evacuations of several Boston area events including the movement of tens of thousands of people in a short period of time. Ken Langford had been at a gathering in Massachusetts on 7/5/12 where he met an official with the Boston office of emergency management. Further exchanges with this person are pending. Locations evacuated on 7/4/12 included the aforementioned Thomas Park, O'Malley Park in Chelsea, MA, the Boston Common, and The Esplanade. "The evacuations of the Common and the Esplanade — a mass movement into the Common's garage and the Storrow Drive (auto) Tunnel — started just before 9:30 p.m. and lasted about 25 minutes." The manager Ken spoke with said things went very smoothly from their standpoint. Boston Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis was quoted as saying "Last night was a good test of our system. It was a way to show that, in fact, the system works, and if something very serious would have happened there, we could safely move large numbers of people out of the danger area."

5. Incident #3: Three graduates from the Burlington (Massachusetts) High School class of 2003 were struck and injured in Laconia, NH on July 4th. All were in the vicinity of a barbecue grill and all were evacuated to a nearby hospital. Reports suggest the storm came on quickly but that they were aware of the approaching weather. Another nearby resident was reported to be in the shower at the time of the strike. Please see the links below for more detail on this incident. Struckbylightning.org was also consulted for the above incident reports.
6. Finally, Ken presented a YouTube video of fireworks from Peekskill, New York, shown against a towering active thunderstorm. In this case the show goes on without delay or evacuation order.
7. Howard Wachtel wondered aloud if some of the recent Colorado wildfires might have been more quickly extinguished if lightning data were used to detect a specific ignition location for a fire. He asked if there was a way to detect fires quickly using visible satellite imaging. Ken pointed out that some satellites scan the surface of the earth infrequently, and satellites which image clouds from geostationary orbit might not see a lightning started fire if it begins beneath the clouds that produce the flash. Al Nibbe suggested that infrared imaging might be used to detect heat. Comments from the membership on modern fire detection would be welcome.
8. Various members shared personal experiences of close encounters with lightning.
 - Ken Langford had his hair stand on end while on the summit of the 9,930 foot Cloud's Rest peak in California's Yosemite National Park. Distant thunder was not heard for 15 minutes after his immediate descent from the summit.
 - Robert Gift witnessed a close strike in a pasture and went to look for a fulgurite, but none was found. He said cows which were 150 feet from the strike were not injured, and did not react to the event.
 - Karen Wells was inside a house chatting with friends when her hair stood on end. She said they all – without discussion – turned and moved to the other end of the house. Lightning then struck nearby, but none were injured.
 - Robert Gift was at the Grand Canyon when a light drizzle began to fall. He stuck his finger in the air and experienced an audible brush discharge like St Elmo's fire. From the pointed finger he could hear white noise combined with a very high pitched whistle. Nearby tourists wondered what he was pointing at.
9. Lightning on the set of The Passion of the Christ was discussed. There were three strikes on the set, and one assistant was struck twice.
10. Finally Ken recounted the Moro Rock incident from 1975. There were two or three widely circulated photos from the incident of people with their hair on end.

This incident also resulted in lawsuits which set some legal precedent concerning “failure to warn.” Although the suits were decided in favor of the government (Park Service), more explicit warnings were subsequently posted near the attraction.

11. LDC Disclaimer: These minutes do not represent official positions of LDC or its members. They simply reflect the comments made at the meeting. Furthermore, the LDC does not explicitly or implicitly recommend or endorse *any* product or service. Any service or product presented in these minutes is done so for the purpose of discussion and analysis. The merit (or lack thereof) is open for consideration and review by the entire membership.

12. Next meeting: Friday, August 10, 2012 at 11:45 AM at St. Anthony Hospital West in the Bighorn Room. Subject: PLEASE NOTE: The Bighorn Room is now the “official home” of the LDC.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenneth Langford, Photographer

In Case You Missed It...Lightning in the News

This is a monthly selection of news and videos about lightning and allied areas as reported in the media. A headline is listed, followed by a link to the article. Please note that some of the links are perishable, which means you’ll need to go to the source for the article. Enjoy!

Couple in Boston hit by lightning are recovering

http://articles.boston.com/2012-07-06/metro/32545064_1_lightning-strikes-john-jensenius-richard-kithil

Witnesses describe lightning that hit pair

<http://www.bostonherald.com/news/regional/view.bg?articleid=1061143792>

Lightning strikes 2 people up Thomas Park

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBtXSirQV3w>

(The flash can be seen at 2:48 in the video)

Pair hit by lightning in South Boston recovering

<http://www.bostonherald.com/news/regional/view.bg?articleid=1061143688&srvc=rss>

Rain, lightning can't dampen Boston's Fourth of July spirit

http://www.bostonherald.com/news/regional/view/20120705rain_lightning_cant_dampen_bostons_fourth_of_july_spirit_and_the_show_goes_on/srvc=home&position=0

Boston police commissioner says Esplanade evacuation went smoothly

<http://www.boston.com/metrodesk/2012/07/05/boston-police-commissioner-says-esplanade-evacuation-went-smoothly/3MUocb6b3ocD4L28PxfLtL/story.html>

3 injured in lightning strike in Laconia, NH

<http://www.wcax.com/story/18952479/3-injured-in-lightning-strike-in-laconia-nh>

3 escape power of lightning

<http://www.unionleader.com/article/20120706/NEWS07/707069977>

Weather experts offer thunderstorm safety tips (video featuring John Jensenius)

<http://www.wmtw.com/news/maine/Weather-experts-offer-thunderstorm-safety-tips/-/8792012/15419644/-/13exnqgz/-/index.html>

The Passion of The Christ: (concerning lightning strikes on the set of the film)

http://www.cbn.com/700club/guests/interviews/scottross-Jim_Caviezel_2.aspx

Peekskill 2012 Fourth of July Fireworks in Lightning Storm

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIPeNI_CaJ4