

LIGHTNING DATA CENTER MINUTES
February 8, 2013
ST. ANTHONY HOSPITAL WEST, LAKEWOOD, CO
On the Web at: www.stanthonyhosp.org/ldc

Monthly Quote: “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.” Mark Twain (1835-1910)

1. The meeting began at 11:55 AM and adjourned at 1:10 PM. Members present: Brown, Collier, Elder, Gift & Cui-Gift, Glancy, Langford, Nibbe, Wachtel and Wells. Langford moderated the meeting. Tim Keenen, Administrative Director of Support Service and Facilities for St. Anthony Hospital attended as a guest.
2. The entire meeting was given over to our guest speaker John Gookin. John is the Curriculum & Research Manager for the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) in Lander, Wyoming. In this position John has been instrumental in the development of safety parameters and literature concerning lightning safety for backcountry recreational users. He presented the talk "Backcountry Lightning Risk Management." Much of the meeting was devoted to discussion of the NOLS published flyer “Lightning Risk Management For Backcountry Campers And Hikers.” Members can find the flyer here for reference:

http://rendezvous.nols.edu/files/Curriculum/research_projects/LightningBrochure_web.pdf

3. As the lunch got under way a web search was done on “Backcountry Lightning Safety.” Much to the horror of the group, a prominent post on one site states: “As a general rule, if you feel that the storm cloud is upon you, you are best off to lay down flat and wait it out.” The entire discussion is linked below under the heading “Bad Advice Before Good.” Perhaps we could petition to have the bad information removed.
4. John Gookin began his presentation with background on how he became involved in lightning safety. When he sought information to publish for his organization he found a scarcity of available data. Many in the lightning field volunteered to give him consultation “if you will publish your findings.” Among those participating were Byerley, Cooper, Holle, Krider, and Rakov. John presented his first paper at the International Lightning Detection Conference (ILDC) meeting in 2000.
5. Since the first paper was published, more recent data suggests that the activities of people who are injured or killed by lightning have changed since the earliest data was collected. For instance, very few are now killed while driving a tractor in an open field since farm equipment now often includes a weather-proof cab.

6. John and Donna Franklin led a team of experts who were responsible for vetting the content of the brochure. This team includes Mary Ann Cooper, Mary Fairbanks, Ron Holle, John Jensenius, Melody Magnus, Jim McNitt and Bill Roeder.
7. The “backcountry” is defined as greater than a 30-minute walk to any building or vehicle. Each year there are 22 million backcountry users, and a large proportion of these are males, either adolescent or young adult. This is therefore the primary target demographic of the brochure.
8. John then proceeded to review the brochure point by point. Discussions included the so-called “lightning safety crouch,” which John says will be absent from the next printing. Also whether the “upwind” side of a mountain is more dangerous. John says data supports exiting via the downwind side. Also whether large bodies of water are as dangerous as they have been made out to be, considering the infrequent reports of injury there. It was suggested that John review maritime reporting. Also whether it is safe to take shelter in a deep dry cave. John suggested this is uncertain, as some might take that to include mines where explosive gases might be present. One very interesting suggestion was that cell phone towers AND the earth around these towers are reportedly struck more frequently by lightning.
9. John mentioned the possibility of including a metal conductor in the base of a tent to route current around the occupants. He was advised of the old discussions we have had at the LDC about a Lightning Safety Bag. He also said that from personal experience they have decreased the recommended spread distance between people (the spread out principle) from 50 feet to 20 feet to maintain group communication. In summary John said there was a risk of people using “backcountry recommendations” in “frontcountry circumstances.” Therefore the brochure prominently outlines Frontcountry Lightning Risk Management. He also noted the need for more fixed rules for adolescents who are not capable of making appropriate judgments.
10. John closed the presentation with a video of a demo of ground current using a gutter full of sand and an electric fence transformer. (See below) Howard cautioned John to be careful with such a demo. John assured us he always measures the voltage and current prior to any hands-on contact.
11. Next meeting: Friday, March 8, 2012 at 11:45 AM at St. Anthony Hospital West. Conference Room TBA. Topic: round table discussion.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ken Langford, Mr. Random Enterprises, Inc.

In Case You Missed It...Lightning Links

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

Bad Advice Before Good

http://www.backpackinglight.com/cgi-bin/backpackinglight/xdpy/forum_thread/44350/index.html

This is a discussion on lightning safety (as mentioned above) that starts with very bad advice, but later does refer to proper sources.

Lightning Strikes Vatican

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XG3MTP7JLw>

Video of a flash to the Vatican, reported as happening just after the Pope had resigned.

NOLS Lightning Safety Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVSCD1mdzY0>

A portion of this longer form video was used to close our meeting. See how John teaches backcountry users about ground current.
