

LIGHTNING DATA CENTER MINUTES
October 10, 2014
ST. ANTHONY HOSPITAL WEST, LAKEWOOD, CO

Monthly Quote: “Our judgment isn't perfect, it never is. We can hone it and learn from our mistakes. ... But it's never going to be perfect. ... We can't be risk-free. Even by avoiding risk, we run the risk of having a boring life.” Lightning Strike Survivor, profiled in the Aug. 28-Sep 3., 2014 edition of Boulder Weekly.

1. Meeting began at 11:45 AM and adjourned at 1:05 PM: Members Present: Clark, Langford, Swanson, Yarnell, Gift, Cherington (Michael and Nancy), Wachtel (Clara and Howard), Elder. Welcome new members Dunne, Murray, Stor, and Durner. Clark moderated the meeting.
2. Ken Langford presented an article from the Boulder Weekly, which profiled a lightning strike survivor on a rock-climbing trek in Wyoming. The survivor, a professional rock-climbing guide, was leading a group of teenagers on a climb when she saw a storm in the distance. There had been no rain and she heard no thunder, but she called the climb due to concerns about a possible lightning strike. While on their way down, lightning struck. She remembered clipping anchors to the side of her harness when she heard a loud boom, followed by flashes of light. She fell away from the anchor and onto a ledge. Her shoe was blown off her right foot and her jeans were shredded. A hole was burned in her sock and she could see her foot had been burned. There was a smell of ozone to the air, which still lingered in her burned sock. With the help of other trip leaders, she was able to safely descend.
3. Phil Yarnell told us of a retired surgeon general, who was on a ladder in a tree to shear tree branches, when he slipped and fell off the ladder. He felt immediately paralyzed and he couldn't speak for the first few moments. He was not able to breathe or vocalize, but was very aware. A few moments later, he was able to yell for help. He later had a very good recovery from his spinal cord injury. Phil wondered how this case related to lightning strike victims and keuranoparalysis. Dr. Michael Cherington reminded us keuranoparalysis is usually a transient event from which people recover.
4. One of our new members told us of a lightning strike at a soccer field. During a game, lightning had hit the stands and flashed down to the ground. When paramedics responded, eight people were down. Seven of them recovered and one died. The seven survivors wore metal cleats and the lone fatality had plastic cleats. The people wearing metal cleats had burns on their heels.

5. Another of our new members was hiking in Yosemite and was climbing out of a V-canyon on a 1500-foot ascent. The party only got about halfway up and set up tents on a piece of granite. Lightning began hitting behind them and then on a near ridge. The party was surrounded. Our member was standing in a puddle. His first sensation was like being on inside of a blue-white neon light. Then there was an explosion. He was knocked off feet and he reported his feet felt shrunken. His instinct was to run behind a rock and get beneath the 2nd tallest tree, which he did. The incident happened while heavy rains were falling. He was drenched. He asked if it was feasible to place a portable lightning rod at a campsite to draw the lightning to it, rather than where the campers are. Members present suggested no, as there is no guarantee the lightning will strike the pole as opposed to other areas and also because if the lightning did strike the pole, there could be concerns about the ground current radiating from the pole.

6. Carl Swanson reported one of Denver's TV broadcast meteorologists was performing the weather segment of the newscast from an outdoor studio during a recent thunderstorm, when there was a huge boom of thunder. The broadcast meteorologist said "Hmm." and continued with the weathercast, when there was a louder clap of thunder. The meteorologist noted the storm was getting a little closer and continued on. A third, yet louder clap of thunder happened. The broadcast meteorologist decided it was time to get inside. The meteorologist later noted there was no cause for concern about safety due to lightning protection systems in place at the station. Carl brought incident to the attention of Dr. Elsom, who said the U.K. has the same issue. Dr. Elsom responded, in part: "Astounding! ... It highlights that however much lightning researchers publicize advice about what a person should do when faced with the lightning risk, many people have failed to absorb/remember this advice or other factors mistakenly seem much more important to them...in the case of the reporter you mention, feel they have to continue their reporting in the location they were told by their Director to do so! However, in so doing, they fail to recognize their obligations to their viewers which is NOT simply to continue reporting their news item but to help save their viewers' lives in the future by ensuring their viewers realize the seriousness of the lightning risk and know what actions to take to lessen the risk posed by them. Clearly, the reporter in this case ignored the latter requirement." Dr. Elsom thought e-mailing various lightning safety links to the broadcast meteorologist would be helpful in the hopes the individual might become an effective advocate for lightning safety. Ken Langford felt contact would be appropriate. Michael Cherington thought inviting media members in for one of our meetings might be a good idea.

7. Ken Langford told us of John Gookin's latest book Lightning, published by the National Outdoor Leadership School. Some of the subject areas addressed include lightning precautions, other thunderstorm hazards, lightning weather and physics, personal judgment/large-group decision-making, and case histories.

8. Phil Yarnell told us Outside Magazine profiled three lightning strike survivors.
9. Questions, comments, notification of errors, and critiques of these minutes are welcome. Please forward those to Steve Clark at: sclarktoto@gmail.com. Please keep your communications professional and respectful. Communications will be forwarded to the appropriate author(s) of the minutes and addressed accordingly.
10. LDC Disclaimer: These minutes do not represent official positions of the LDC or its members. They simply reflect the comments made at the meeting. Furthermore, the LDC does not implicitly or explicitly recommend or endorse any product or service. Any service or product presented in these minutes is done so for purposes of discussion and analysis. The merit (or lack thereof) is open for the consideration and review by the entire membership.
11. Next meeting: Friday, November 14, 2014 at 11:45 AM at St. Anthony Hospital West. Conference Room TBA.

Respectfully Submitted,
Steven E. Clark, Consulting Meteorologist

In Case You Missed It...Lightning Links

This is a monthly listing of periodicals, 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!

“Lightning Strike Kills 11 in Columbia”

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/world/americas/colombia-lightning-strike/index.html>

“Lightning Injures North Texas Teacher as Strong Storms Pass Through Region”

<http://lubbockonline.com/texas/2014-10-03/lightning-injures-north-texas-teacher-strong-storms-pass-through-region#.VDdPir3nZdh>

“A Bolt Out of the Blue” Boulder Weekly, Aug. 28 to Sep. 3, 2014, pp. 28-32

<http://www.boulderweekly.com/article-13279-a-bolt-out-of-the-blue.html>

Lightning by John Gookin – Available via Amazon.com

<http://www.amazon.com/NOLS-Lightning-Library-John-Gookin/dp/0811713644>

“The Body Electric” Outside Magazine, September 22, 2014 October 2014

<http://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/nature/The-Body-Electric.html>