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Dedicated toll free home  
safety hotline, 1-877-221-SAFE

## FLASH POINT OF VIEW

# Protecting Ourselves from the "Everyday Disaster"



By Leslie Chapman-Henderson, FLASH Executive Director

So often when we talk about disaster safety, we focus on mammoth events like hurricanes, floods or earthquakes — overlooking the daily

threat of lightning-producing thunderstorms. Many would be surprised to learn that lightning is one of the most consistently deadly and costly disasters in Florida.

Figures vary widely, but according to FEMA and the National Lightning Safety Institute respectively, approximately 100 deaths and more than \$6 billion in annual property damage can be attributed to lightning. Think about it: lightning strikes on a football field or golf course and in an instant, a life is lost or forever changed. Many times tragedy occurs even before the rain begins.

What about our homes? Don't we all know someone who has lost a telephone, computer or air conditioning unit to lighting or electrical surge? Sometimes an appliance like a television just stops working, and we may not think to blame it on lighting or surge.

Most know that Florida is the Sunshine State, but not everyone knows the flip side — Florida is the undisputed lightning capital of the United States. The combination of our climate and outdoor lifestyles makes the threat of lightning more severe here than anywhere else. That's the bad news. The good news is that lightning is one of the most affordably prevented disasters.

That's why this edition of NewsFLASH is dedicated to lighting ... what we call "the everyday disaster". Inside you'll learn about personal lightning safety, affordable whole house surge protection, lighting facts, Web site links and more.

We urge you to heed the danger associated with lightning, especially in a state full of citizens who love the beach, boating and outdoors. Read inside about the trends in lightning protection. You'll see that we've come a long way from old-fashioned lightning rods to whole house surge protectors installed and maintained by utility providers.

We are happy to bring you this information, which we gathered in response to your calls and emails. I think you'll find it useful. Let me know. Contact FLASH toll-free at 1-877-221-SAFE, or via email at [flash@flash.org](mailto:flash@flash.org).

## FLASH LINKS

National Lightning Safety Institute (NLSI) [www.lightningsafety.com](http://www.lightningsafety.com)

State Farm Insurance surge protection information  
[www.statefarm.com/consumer/surge.htm](http://www.statefarm.com/consumer/surge.htm)

Lightning Strike & Electrical Surge Survivors: [www.mindspring.com/~lightningstrike/](http://www.mindspring.com/~lightningstrike/)

NOAA/National Weather Service: [www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov)



# Surge Protection for Your Home

Dollar figures for lightning and surge losses vary widely, but the best figures available estimate at least \$2 billion in electrical and electronic equipment damage yearly — making lightning and surge a leading cause of electrical equipment failure.

Surge damage occurs when the normal electrical circuit is suddenly exposed to a large dose of energy. Lightning is the most obvious surge source, but normal utility switching operations or downed power lines can generate surge too. Inside a building, surge may come from fax machines, copiers, air conditioners, elevators, or motor pumps. Inside or outside, only lightning strikes within one mile of a structure are likely to damage electronic or electrical equipment.

A surge protection device (SPD) is the best way to prevent or reduce damage caused from electrical surges and should be installed strategically outside and throughout the home. SPD's are designed to

redirect high-current surges to the ground and bypass equipment to limit the voltage that is impressed.

## Two different zones of defense should be used to provide maximum protection:

The first zone is the electric meter, where the utility power comes into the home. A “whole house SPD” can be installed directly into the meter box to reduce externally generated surges, including indirect lightning strikes on the line. Installing a whole house SPD requires the service of a professional electrician, and many local utility departments will install and/or lease units for \$5/month. A whole house SPD rating should be between 20,000 and 40,000 amps. It should use fire proof and explosion proof polycarbonate glass-fiber reinforced enclosure with a matching mounting connector.

The second zone of defense is inside the



home because a SPD installed at the meter will not protect against internally generated surges. Appliances, such as microwaves, refrigerators, and garage door openers that have a power plug require a surge protection device that plugs into the wall. SPDs for appliances inside the home should not be rated less than 5,000 amps. Further, appliances that use two services, such as a television set with a cable wire and an electrical cord, may require a combination SPD that allows both a cable and a power connection. Computers, answering machines, satellite dish components and VCRs may also require combination protection.

Inside the home, SPD's should be installed as close to the equipment as possible for maximum protection. Cable lengths should be as short and straight as possible to minimize the resistive path of the circuit to the ground. Also, the surge protectors should be equipped with indicators that show if the circuit is grounded and operating properly.

While nothing can prevent damage from a direct lightning strike, SPD's can protect your valuable electronics and appliances from the most common source of damage — surge.

Editor's Note: See the table for information on surge protection rentals in your county.

## Kid's Corner Forecasting the Weather - Without TV!

Hey kids, become your home's own weather expert! Try these fun activities and try to predict the weather in your neighborhood!

- ✓ Count the number of cricket chirps in 14 seconds. Add forty. The total will equal the air temperature in F. within one degree.
- ✓ If spiders leave their webs, expect a storm. If they work when it is raining, expect a short storm.
- ✓ Look for rainbows ...if they're green in color, rain will continue; if red is the dominant color, look for wind and rain; if blue is strong, the air is clearing; if the rainbow is broken in 2-3 places, look for rainy weather for 2-3 days.

## Lightning by the Numbers

Lightning Trends (Thirty-five years of experience helped develop this lightning incident profile)

### 1. Location of Incident:

- 40% Unreported
- 27% Open fields & recreation areas (not golf)
- 14% Under trees (not golf)
- 8% Water-related  
(boating, fishing, swimming...)
- 5% Golf/golf under trees
- 3% Heavy equipment and machinery-related
- 2.4% Telephone-related
- 0.7% Radio, transmitter & antenna-related

### 2. Gender of Victims = 84% male; 16% female

### 3. Months of most incidents =

June 21%, July 30%, Aug 22%

### 4. Days of week of most incidents = Sun./Wed./Sat.

### 5. Time of day of most incidents = 2 PM to 6 PM

### 6. No. of victims = One (91%), two or more (9%)

### 7. Deaths by State, Top Five = FL, MI, TX, NY, TN

### 8. Injuries by State, Top Five = FL, MI, PA, NC, NY

For information on ordering these fact-filled FLASH Cards, call (877) 221-SAFE.



## ASK FLASH

## FLASH Researches Your Safety Questions: Which Florida Utility Companies Offer Low-Cost Surge Protection?

Many of you have contacted us this year and asked about the availability of whole house surge protection. We recently conducted a telephone survey and found an encouraging trend among utility providers to offer low-cost rental and installation of the units. Below are the results of our poll. As you will see, not every utility provider offers this service, but the number that do is up 500% from last year.

Things to remember when calling your power company for whole house surge protection:

- ⚡ Customer service departments can help
- ⚡ Most providers offer a limited warranty on meter unit and damaged items
- ⚡ Most are rental units (pay monthly with a year/2 year contract)
- ⚡ Cost is approximately \$5.00/month for meter unit and 2 inside plugs for sensitive appliances (television, etc.)
- ⚡ Top brands include:
  - Meter Treater, [www.metertreater.com](http://www.metertreater.com)
  - Home Guard, [www.nwrec.com](http://www.nwrec.com)
  - Tri-State Utility Products, [www.tristateutility.com](http://www.tristateutility.com)

#### CLAY

City of Green Cove Springs  
904-529-2249  
229 Walnut Street  
Green Cove Springs, FL  
32043-3499  
[www.greencovesprings.com](http://www.greencovesprings.com)

#### CLAY

Clay Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
352-473-8000  
225 West Walker Drive  
Keystone Heights, FL 32656-6735  
[www.clayelectric.com](http://www.clayelectric.com)

#### DUVAL

Jacksonville Beach Electric  
904-247-6241  
1460 Shetter Avenue  
Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250-3432  
[Cwsmith@leading.net](mailto:Cwsmith@leading.net)

#### ESCAMBIA

Gulf Power Company  
850-969-3111  
500 Bayfront Parkway  
Pensacola, FL 32501-6101  
[www.southernco.com](http://www.southernco.com)

#### GADSDEN

Talquin Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
850-627-7651  
1640 West Jefferson Street  
Quincy, FL 32351-5679

#### GLADES

Glades Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
863-946-0061  
1190 US Highway 27  
East Moore Haven, FL 33471-7002  
[www.gladsec.com](http://www.gladsec.com)

#### GULF

Gulf Coast  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
850-639-2216  
722 West Highway 22  
Wewahitchka, FL 32465-9542  
[www.gcec.com](http://www.gcec.com)

#### HARDEE

Peace River Electric  
Cooperative, Inc.  
863-773-4116  
1499 US Highway 17  
North Wauchula, FL  
33873-5007  
[www.precoc.org](http://www.precoc.org)

#### HILLSBOROUGH

Tampa Electric Company  
813-223-0800  
702 North Franklin Street  
Tampa, FL 33602-4418  
[www.teco.net](http://www.teco.net)

#### JACKSON

West Florida Electric  
Cooperative Association, Inc.  
850-263-3231  
5282 Peanut Road  
Graceville, FL 32440-4248  
[www.wfeca.net](http://www.wfeca.net)

#### LAKE

City of Leesburg  
352-728-9704  
501 West Meadow Street  
Leesburg, FL 34748-5151

#### LEE

Lee County  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
800-282-1643  
4980 Bayline Drive  
North Fort Myers, FL  
33917-3909  
[www.lceec.net](http://www.lceec.net)

#### LEVY

Central Florida Electric  
Cooperative, Inc.  
352-493-2511  
PO Box 9  
Chiefland, FL 32644-0009  
[www.cfcec.com](http://www.cfcec.com)

#### MARION

City of Ocala  
352-351-6600  
2100 NE 30<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Ocala, FL 34470-4875  
[www.ocalafl.org](http://www.ocalafl.org)

#### MONROE

Florida Keys Electric  
Cooperative Association, Inc.  
305-852-2431  
91605 Overseas Highway  
Tavernier, FL 33070-2504  
[www.fkec.com](http://www.fkec.com)

#### MONROE

Utility Board  
of the City of Key West  
305-295-1001  
1001 James Street  
Key West, FL 33040-6935  
[www.kwcityelectric.com](http://www.kwcityelectric.com)

#### POLK

City of Bartow  
863-534-0100  
450 North Wilson Ave.  
Bartow, FL 33830-3954

#### POLK

City of Lakeland  
863-834-6575  
501 East Lemon Street  
Lakeland, FL 33801-5079  
[www.lakeland.net](http://www.lakeland.net)

#### SANTA ROSA

Escambia River  
Electric Coop., Inc.  
850-675-4521  
3425 Highway 4  
West Jay, FL 32565-1719  
[www.erec.net](http://www.erec.net)

#### ST. LUCIE

Ft. Pierce Utilities Authority  
561-466-1600  
206 South Sixth Street  
Ft. Pierce, FL 34950-4222  
[fpua@gate.net](mailto:fpua@gate.net)

#### SUMTER

Sumpter Electric  
Cooperative, Inc.  
352-793-3801  
293 South US Highway 301  
Sumterville, FL 33585-4911  
[www.sumter-electric.com](http://www.sumter-electric.com)

#### SUWANNEE

Suwannee Valley Electric  
Cooperative, Inc.  
904-364-7800  
1725 South Ohio Avenue  
Live Oak, FL 32060-4524

# Reduce Your Risk of Lightning Injuries with These Tips



- ⚡ **Before the storm**, stay alert and listen carefully at the first sign of lightning or thunder. If the time delay between seeing the flash of lightning and hearing the thunderclap is less than 30 seconds, activate your emergency/evacuation plan and seek shelter. Lightning often hits before the rain begins, so don't wait for the rain to start before leaving.
- ⚡ **If you are outdoors**, avoid water, high ground, and open spaces. Stay away from metal objects, including wires, fences and motors. Find shelter in a sizeable building or in a fully enclosed metal vehicle such as a car or truck with the windows completely shut. Don't get under a small canopy, small picnic shelter or near trees. If you cannot take shelter indoors, crouch down with your feet together and place your hands over your ears to minimize hearing damage from the thunder. Stay at least 15 feet away from other people.
- ⚡ **If you are indoors**, avoid water and stay away from doors and windows. Do not use the telephone or headsets. Turn off, unplug and stay away from appliances, computers, power tools and television sets. Lightning may strike exterior electric and phone lines, inducing shocks to inside equipment.
- ⚡ **After the storm**, don't resume activities until at least thirty minutes after the last lightning strike or thunderclap. Call 911 immediately if anyone is injured and use First Aid procedures. Lightning victims do not carry an electrical charge, so it is safe to administer medical treatment.



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*FLASH is a non-profit, 501(C)3 charitable organization  
dedicated to disaster safety education.*