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Media contact: Karen Beisler, 941-861-5473; kbeisler@scgov.net

Project contact: Ed McCrane, 941-861-5495; cell 941-232-8366; emccrane@scgov.net

Seek shelter, follow tips for lightning safety

Sarasota County warns residents to take lightning and thunderstorms seriously this summer.

The Fourth of July weekend is one of the most deadly times of the year for lightning strikes. Lightning strikes are the second leading cause of storm-related deaths in Florida. All thunderstorms produce lightning, which can strike as far as 10 miles from rainfall.

When people hear thunder, they are in danger of being struck by lightning and should seek safe shelter, according to Ed McCrane, Sarasota County emergency management chief.

The most dangerous place during a thunderstorm is in an open area. Nearly half of all lightning deaths occur in open areas. Trees, picnic shelters, tents and convertibles offer no protection from lightning. The safest place is a building, such as a home, away from the windows. Vehicles with metal roofs also provide safe shelter from lightning.

People are urged to use the "30/30 rule" when they're outside:

- When you see lightening, count the seconds until you hear thunder. Seek shelter if the time is under 30 seconds.
- Wait 30 minutes or more after hearing the last thunder before leaving shelter.

Follow these lightning safety tips:

- Avoid contact with corded phones and electrical equipment or cords. Unplug electronic equipment before the storm arrives.
- Avoid contact with plumbing. Don't wash hands, take a shower, wash dishes or do laundry.
- Stay away from windows and doors and stay off porches.
- Don't lie on concrete floors or lean against concrete walls.

If a person is struck by lightning, call 911 for medical help. Lightning strikes can cause cardiac arrest, burns and nerve damage. Bystanders are in no danger by initiating medical aid and CPR. The victim will not have an electrical charge. Many deaths can be prevented if victims receive proper, immediate first aid.

For more information on disasters, and to find out how you can *Get a Plan!* for disaster preparedness, visit the All Hazards website at www.scgov.net.

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