

LIGHTNING SAFETY

As a resident of The Villages you need to be aware of the risk that lightning poses for you, your family, your pets, and your property and what you can do about it. Florida is the Lightning Capital of the US and typically leads the nation each year in fatalities, injuries, and property damage. All thunderstorms produce lightning that can be highly dangerous and unpredictable.

Lightning Protection For Your Home Due To A Direct Lightning Strike

A direct lightning strike does not happen very often but it can cause substantial structural damage with ensuing fire. The chance that your home will be struck is very very low but it is not zero and is greater than winning the lottery.

Only you the homeowner can decide if you need a lightning protection system commonly called lightning rods. One way to think about it is assessing your own tolerance for risk. For example, if you have a **high tolerance for risk** you choose to do nothing, the odds are with you, the money stays in your pocket, and if the worst does happen you rely on your homeowner's insurance policy.

On the other hand, if you have a **low tolerance for risk** and wish to seek peace of mind to avoid the loss of your home, possessions, pets, vehicles and the stress of the entire ordeal to reconstruct and live in temporary quarters you may wish to consider a lightning protection system. Contrary to popular myth they do not attract lightning but simply give it a safe path to ground.

If you do choose to install a lightning protection system be advised that there is no local, state, or federal oversight for residential properties and this can be a buyer beware marketplace. Many lightning protection system installers do police themselves by becoming listed by Underwriters Laboratories and employing installers who have passed a minimum of four exams to qualify as a Master Installer by the Lightning Protection Institute. Do not be misled by a potential installer telling you that all equipment used is UL listed. Although this may be true it does not mean that the system to be installed will meet nationally recognized standards. Here are the names of three firms that that are known to be working in our area who currently meet the above criteria:

A-1 Lightning Protection Services, Inc., 1-866-465-0620

Central Lightning Protection, Inc., 407-380-6995

Triangle Lightning Protection, Inc., 352-483-7020

Lightning Protection For Your Appliances and Electronics Due to An Indirect Lightning Strike

Indirect lightning may strike trees, flag poles, neighbors home, or some unknown nearby location. These are more common but usually less severe than a direct lightning strike.

Lightning-induced surges can damage control boards and computer chips, which are susceptible to even a relatively minor surge. Remember – Lightning Loves Technology!

To protect against damage to your sensitive electronic equipment such as computers, televisions, microwave ovens, telephone answering machines, games, refrigerators, garage door operators, irrigation controllers, motorized recliners & sofas, etc. you may wish to consider both primary and secondary surge protection.

Primary Surge Protection

This is surge protection installed on your electric meter by your electric utility. For example, SECO will lease a surge protector on your meter for \$5.95 per month or purchase for \$349. It can also be achieved by engaging a licensed electrician to install a surge protector on a dedicated two-pole breaker on your electrical panel. This level of protection is to prevent surge damage to hard-wired equipment that you do not plug into a 120-volt wall outlet. This is not “whole house” surge protection.

Secondary Surge Protection

This level of surge protection is called point-of-use and the devices are sometimes referred to as “plug ins.” These surge protectors plug into a 120-volt wall outlet to protect microwave ovens, garage door openers, refrigerators. Power strips are another form of secondary surge protection for televisions and computers. These devices can be purchased from electronics, hardware, and big box stores.

Surges can also enter your home from other sources such as telephone and satellite/cable TV lines. Therefore, it is vitally important that telephone lines to an answering machine or computer be routed through a secondary surge protector. This is also true for the coaxial cable line for a television.

The above is the current state-of-the art but safety is never absolute. It should be recognized that anything man-made can fail but the systems and equipment discussed above do function as designed a very high percentage of the time. As a homeowner, you should conduct your own due diligence for your lightning risk.

Lightning Tips for Villagers Presentation

This is lightning 101 to help make you an informed consumer living here in the “Lightning Capital of the US”. It presents information based on research from the University of Florida and over 250 years of science and experience and clarifies many of the myths and misunderstandings about lightning. The knowledge gained in this one hour presentation will help you make an informed decision about personal lightning safety and the lightning risk to your home, appliances and electronics. It is a Power Point program offered to Villages clubs, church, and civic groups. This is a free, non-commercial, community service. If your club would benefit from a presentation contact Len Hathaway at lhatha@aol.com or Bob Freeman at stalit1@aol.com.