FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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GOVERNOR CRIST, STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS URGE LIGHTNING SAFETY DURING THUNDERSTORMS

TALLAHASSEE — Governor Charlie Crist and state emergency management officials this week are urging all residents and visitors to have a plan of action for lightning conditions and seek safe shelter during thunderstorms and severe weather. This year, there have been 3 lightning-related deaths recorded in Florida. One person was killed and 27 were injured near Lakeland (Polk County) when lightning struck an outdoor church group gathering on the afternoon of July 4th.

“Lightning is a common and deadly threat, especially during the summer months where thunderstorms form daily and so many are outdoors,” said Governor Charlie Crist. “I urge all Floridians and visitors to remain safe by paying close attention to changing weather conditions and to immediately seek shelter when thunder is heard.”

When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors!

Florida is the lightning capital of the United States. Each year, averages of 9 people are killed and 39 people are injured by lightning in Florida. Florida totaled 30 fatalities and 166 injuries from lightning strikes during the years 2004-2008. Nearly 1.5 million cloud-to-ground lightning strikes are detected every year in Florida, which is an average of more than 25 per square mile.

All thunderstorms produce lightning. Did you know that lightning can travel horizontally from thunderstorm clouds and strike as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall?

“Simply put, if you can hear the thunder, you are at risk of being struck by lightning,” said State Meteorologist Ben Nelson. “Play it safe and get inside until the storms pass.”

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

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Know the 30/30 Rule

Florida emergency management officials encourage families and businesses to incorporate the “30/30 Rule” when conducting outdoor activities. This two-part rule states that people should first seek immediate shelter once the time between a lightning flash and thunder is 30 seconds or less.

The second part of this rule states that people should remain in safe shelter for 30 minutes following the final clap of thunder. Many lightning strike victims assumed that the threat had passed once a thunderstorm’s rains had ended, when in fact lightning can travel far from the core of a storm’s downpours.

Floridians should always be aware of weather conditions when participating in activities outdoors and have a plan in case thunderstorms develop. A portable NOAA all-hazards radio will provide weather forecast updates and can audibly alert you if a severe thunderstorm watch or warning is issued. To learn more go to www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov.

Make a difference, learn CPR

If a person is struck by lightning, call 911 and get medical help immediately. 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 carry an electrical charge. Some deaths can be prevented if the victim receives the proper first aid immediately.

For more information on the Florida Division of Emergency Management and to GET A PLAN!, please visit: www.FloridaDisaster.org. All students, teachers and parents can find educational information and free downloadable materials on the lightning safety and the “30/30 Rule” at: www.KidsGetAPlan.com. And for the latest flash reports go to: www.YouTube.com/FloridaSERT.

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