

## Costs mount after City lightning strike (South Africa)

<http://www.groccotts.co.za/2015/01/15/costs-mount-after-city-lightning-strike/>

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By Groccotts

Many Grahamstown residents were left with wrecked appliances and damage to a key installation in the city has left several institutions without internet, following an electrical storm this week.

A lightning strike on the morning of Wednesday 14 January blew ADSL routers, telephones, computers and domestic appliances.

Many across the city are counting their losses while desperately looking for ways to get back online. Information technology shops in the city have had high numbers of customers seeking their services following the storm.

Speaking to Grocott's Mail on Thursday 15 January, technician at Insight Technologies Robert Fargher said, "We've had a huge influx of people across town coming to us saying their computers are not connecting to the internet.

"When we go and check we find that it is the same story of the lightning."

Fargher said the company has gone out of its way to buy extra stocks to cater for the high demand.

Fargher is also one of many whose personal belongings were damaged by the lightning. He said the lightning struck his Robinson Street home near PJ Olivier, running through the telephone line.

"It blew up the ADSL router, 8-port hub, DVD player and my personal computer," he said.

According to Fargher the National English Literacy Museums was one of their worst affected customers. "They got hit quite badly", said a concerned Fargher.

Operations manager at IT Solutions Jonathan Scheepers said around 15 clients had reported damaged ADSL routers, with one of them failing.

Scheepers estimated the damage he'd seen at R10 000. "There were clients who came in with lots of damaged equipment. There's also one client who had five damaged computers costing him R50 000."

Scheepers said because the lightning had been conducted through the telephone lines, it was more powerful.

"Sometimes it goes through power lines, but this time it was too strong, with millions of volts directly entering houses."

Another resident who bore the brunt of the lightning storm is Jenny Redpath of Kings Heights Estate.

The lightning struck her DSTV satellite dish, a kitchen appliance and a garage door motor.

Narrating how a single bolt burnt a hole in her toaster, she said, "It came through the window of my open-plan lounge and went straight to the tap on the kitchen counter, making a dent before burning a hole on the side of my toaster."

According Redpath, her domestic worker narrowly escaped harm.

"I'm grateful that the lady who helps at home was not harmed, because she was standing very close to the action."

The campus network at Rhodes University went off for a couple of hours after the lightning hit the Africa Media Matrix (AMM), which houses radio equipment that provides internet to various institutions.

According to IT Operations manager at Rhodes, Guy Halse, the AMM is also home to one of the University's three data centres, containing the institution's information.

Halse said they had managed to recover all the information in the R5-million data centre.

Explaining the extent of the damage caused by the lightning strike, Halse said, "Basically the network system, telephonic instruments and the internet links at AMM were knocked off."

Halse said that also affected were the Joza Youth Hub, Stenden University in Port Alfred, Duna Library and various Joza schools.

He said their radio equipment allowing internet connectivity was are mounted on top of the building's roof.

The AMM roof is one of the highest structures in town.

Speaking of the financial implications, Halse said, "Excluding Stenden's equipment, the cost of the disaster is around R400 000 at this moment, but we are still investigating."

Explaining how the building attracted the lightning, he said, "An enormous amount of copper cable runs around the AMM building in order to supply telephones and computers, so when lightning strikes, the copper works as an antenna."

Halse said the AMM, which houses the University's Journalism and Media Studies Department, is 80% operational after technicians used spares from stores to replace the damaged equipment.

"We had an under-supply of spares, so it will take time before it is fully operational," Electronics and Systems Engineer in the AMM building Andre Jourdan said.

"The lightning hit the front of the building and went through all the wiring and metal structures and caused lot of damage."