

Lightning kills 2 KZN schoolgirls [South Africa]

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Durban – Two schoolgirls have been killed by lightning while on their way to school in Msinga, northern KwaZulu-Natal, the province's department of co-operative governance and traditional affairs said on Tuesday. Nomcebo Shabalala, 8, and Amahle Sithole, 13, were on their way to Mandlethu Primary School in Bafuthi village where they were in Grade 2 and 6, respectively.

Acting MEC for co-operative governance and traditional affairs Weziwe Thusi described the girls' tragic deaths as a devastating blow to the entire community. Thusi said the uMzinyathi district disaster centre had been directed to work closely with the bereaved families.

She said the frequency of lightning incidents during the summer months had increased because of climate change. "While this is an act of nature, it is a growing problem, especially in summer, and warrants that we all learn methods of adapting to these unpredictable weather patterns," said Thusi.

She said the department, in partnership with municipalities, would continue its awareness campaigns and work with schools "to ensure that children at a young age are armed with information on what to do to cope with the growing problems caused by natural disasters".

"We also advise communities to install lightning rods at their homes as part of mitigating the impact," said Thusi.

The department said it was also considering recommending the crafting of by-laws in municipalities that would compel all public facilities such as schools, hospitals, community halls and new infrastructure to feature lightning conductors that meet the nationally determined standards for safety.