

Lightning kills two schoolgirls (South Africa)

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TWO children, eight-year-old Nomcebo Shabala and 13-year-old Amahle Sithole were struck and killed by lightning last Tuesday while walking to Mandlethu Primary School in Msinga.

Family and friends are devastated by the loss of these two young girls.

A Cogta spokesperson said that the frequency of lightning incidents in summer has increased because of climate change. An awareness campaign, in partnership with municipalities, is being undertaken in schools.

In the past two weeks, thunderstorms have occurred in the area and it is important to know what action to take.

The SA Weather Service points out that lightning occurs with every thunderstorm - it is a build-up and discharge of electrical energy between positively and negatively charged areas in the atmosphere, and clouds.

THE CHANCES OF BEING STRUCK ARE ONE IN 350 000, BUT THESE ODDS CAN BE REDUCED BY:

- staying indoors during a lightning storm, and if travelling, remain in the vehicle;
- indoors - keep away from windows, avoid concrete floors and walls, metal objects, don't bath or shower or use any electrical appliance or phone;
- outdoors - if in the open seek shelter in a building;
- avoid hilltops, sheltering under a lone tree and keep your distance from fences, phones or power lines and steel structures; and
- do not remain in or on water.

It is not true that rubber soled shoes and rubber provide protection – they do not.

An American source states that the main lightning safety guide is the 30-30 rule. After you see lightning count to 30. If you hear thunder before you reach 30. Go indoors or take appropriate precautions.

If no shelter is available, try to be the lowest object around outside. Lightning causes electric currents along the top of the ground, which can be deadly.

The best body position to get in is a low crouch, hugging your body into your knees. Although this could lead to slight discomfort, it keeps you low and ensures your heart, lungs and brain are not directly on the ground.

Remember too that the old saying "lightning never strikes twice in the same spot" is definitely not true.