

Mom, baby die after lightning strikes home [S. Africa]

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By Kamini Padayachee

Durban - An Eshowe mother and her 11-month-old baby were killed when lightning struck their home on Christmas Day.

Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs MEC Nomusa Dube and health officials visited the area on Wednesday to assess the damage caused by a thunderstorm on Tuesday afternoon.

Department spokesman Vernon Mchunu said Nqobile Gumede, 22, and her daughter, Pamela, had been in their rondawel in Nkanini, a rural area near Eshowe, when lightning struck and the home caught fire.

"The house burnt to the ground and they could not be saved," Mchunu said.

Dube said Nqobile's sister, Zama Gumede, had been at work and only returned home after the storm.

"I have spoken to her. She is devastated and in shock. Her neighbours are also traumatised and we have arranged counselling for them."

She added that the department would provide temporary shelter for Gumede and assist with burial arrangements.

Dube said four other people were also injured when lightning struck their homes in the area during the storm.

"They had bruises and other slight injuries, but we have insisted that they go to the hospital to ensure they have no internal injuries."

She also said a lightning conductor would be erected in the area as it was prone to lightning strikes. Last year seven people were killed in Mpumazi, Eshowe, after their homes were struck by lightning.

The department had installed thousands of conductors and embarked on a province-wide education campaign to ensure people know how to stay safe during extreme weather.

"Extreme weather patterns are an act of God, so all we can do is prepare people and ensure that they know what to do if a storm hits."

She encouraged people to form co-operatives and buy lightning conductors.

"These conductors can be purchased at hardware stores, and (one) can protect quite a few houses."