

1 Dead, 12 Injured After Lightning Strikes Sowetan Soccer Match

Sunday, March 13, 2011

Johannesburg emergency services have confirmed that an 11-year-old boy died on Saturday after being struck by lightning in Soweto.

According to spokesman Percy Morokane the boy, 11, was refereeing a soccer game in Soweto extension one when a lightning bolt struck him around 2pm.

Unfortunately he was pronounced dead at the scene while a number of the players were also affected by the bolt. Twelve of them were taken to Leratong Hospital, in the West Rand, with serious injuries.

Morokane warned that the lightning season was not over, and that the Highveld was particularly prone to violent thunderstorms.

He said that people should heed weather updates, and avoid being in open spaces for half an hour before or after storms.

The South African Highveld has a lightning ground flash density of 6 to 9 flashes/km²/year, with a high incidence of thunderstorm days per year (some 40–70).

Lightning strikes mainly occur from September through to April (normal summer rainfall period), and most strikes take place in the late afternoon (3:00 pm to 6:00 pm).

Nationalgeographic.com describes lightning as follows :

On any given afternoon, unstable breezes and moisture ratchet up cumulonimbus clouds in a whirlwind of updrafts and downdrafts that cause particles of rain, ice, and snow to collide. The collisions prompt electrical charges to separate. Positive charges shoot high, while negative charges hang low. Electrical imbalance intensifies within the cloud and between the cloud and ground. In an attempt to restore balance, to equalize the charge separation, lightning flashes rip through the clouds, snap out of the sky, and crack to the ground. The average flash packs enough energy to keep a 100-watt light bulb lit for three months. The flash of light heats the air around it to nearly 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit (27,760 degrees Celsius), which is hotter than the surface of the sun. The scorching heat forces the air to expand in an explosion of thunder.