

Central Florida Lightning!©

by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee, Florida – August 10, 2019

Did you know that central Florida is considered to be the “Lightning Capital” of the USA! Based on what I see from my back-yard patio vantage point at this time of the year, it’s hard to imagine that the almost-daily “severe” thunderstorms and associated lightning could be equaled anywhere else! As dangerous as thunderstorms and intense lightning activity can be, I often have been outside, but under cover, however unwise this is, to observe and marvel at this extremely powerful force of nature.

So, why is central Florida subjected to such a high frequency of thunderstorms and lightning occurrences? Simply stated, given the state’s geography and the fact that its peninsular shape divides the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, the state is subject to an endless array of changing weather phenomena that is conducive to such storm activity. There are various classifications of lightning such as cloud-to-cloud, cloud-to-ground, and inside-a-thunderstorm. Of course of major concern to humans is the cloud-to-ground type.

In electrical theory, current flow is based on the principal of “unlikes attracting one another” and if one unlike is more powerful than the other, then there is a “potential difference” and current will flow in one direction or the other. So, a very-highly-charged lightning bolt, whether one considers it to be positively or negatively charged, will seek out the shortest path to an “unlike” source; in the case of cloud-to-ground lightning, the path could be to the tallest tree around, to the roof of a tall house, or to almost any other object on the ground. How about a golfer holding a club up high (a real “no-no”; get off the course at the first sound of thunder)! One controversial thought is that lightning rods on top of houses actually attract lightning. This is not the case for the reason that the exact path for a lightning strike is very random and if a lightning rod on top of a house just happens to be the shortest path of any given lightning strike in its quest to seek out its unlike, then the rod and its conducting cables will take the strike, route it to ground, and normally prevent major damage to the house.

Lightning is indeed very powerful and can cause fires, destruction and death. Humans have survived lightning strikes but may suffer permanent mental or physical impairments afterwards. I have personally witnessed tall trees taking direct lightning hits and the trees literally explode and/or catch on fire and then are dead. I have recently noticed 2 tall trees on the south side of the Kissimmee Bay Country Club’s 11th fairway that I believe were killed by lightning strikes. Please see the following photos.



STAY SAFE – BEWARE OF LIGHTNING!