MOE should have lightning safety rules for schools

THE death of a 16-year-old student at the UPM field in Serdang last Tuesday could have been avoided if the organisers of the inter-school football game had observed the lightning safety rules that had been posted in the mass media for over a decade.

In the 2.45pm incident, the victim and his friend had taken shelter under a tree beside the field during a thunderstorm when lightning struck them. The victim died a few hours later in hospital while his friend was in serious condition.

The tree, which was struck by lightning, bore the characteristic lightning current path which is marked by splintered bark.

According to the security guards, another tree nearby had also been struck by lightning not long ago.

This incident should be taken seriously by the Education Ministry since there was a serious breach of safety protocols by the school officials who organised the game.

These officials should have ensured that all the students were evacuated into sturdy buildings before the thunderstorm broke and that they remained there until the storm was well and truly over.

The ministry should view this kind of incident seriously since the students are minors under the supervision of adults who should know better.

With the thunderstorm season in full gear with the change in monsoon, the public, especially teachers and students, is reminded to strictly follow the lightning safety rules listed below when outdoors:

> STOP all outdoor activities and seek shelter as soon as you see dark thunder clouds gathering on the horizon or over the hill. Lightning can strike up to 15km away from the thunder cloud i.e. even before the rain starts!
> RUN for a shelter if you can hear thunder or see a lightning bolt. You are already in danger of being struck by lightning;
> DO not wait for the rain to fall before you act. Sometimes, lightning occurs before the rain starts to fall. Never use an umbrella in a lightning storm;
> DO not take shelter under a tree or in a tent, a small shed, a kongsi, a rotunda or a roadside food stall. For small shelters, ensure that they have been installed with a proper lightning protection system before you take shelter in them;
> TAKE shelter inside a sturdy or large building (e.g. shop or house), inside a metal roofed vehicle (e.g. bus, van or car) or under a large structure (e.g. bridge). Do NOT loiter outside a large building to avoid being struck by debris from lightning damage;
> IF there is no proper shelter nearby, get down from an elevated position (e.g. mound, hill top or platform). Get into any depression in the ground or in a dry drain;
> GET into a Lightning Defensive Position i.e. squat with your feet together and close your ears with your hands. Do NOT lie down. Do NOT touch anyone or any metal objects (e.g. fence, gate etc.) near you;
> IF it rains, get your clothes wet because wet clothing helps to reduce serious injury to the lightning struck person. Let the current flow over you instead of inside you;
> INSIDE a shelter, do NOT touch any metallic object, electric equipment or cable. Do NOT use the telephone unless it is really urgent. Use a mobile phone instead (if available). Keep AWAY from the balcony, verandah, doorway, window, wall or pillar; and
> STAY inside your shelter for 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard. Lightning can strike up to 15km away from the thundercloud i.e. even after the rain had stopped!

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