

## Lightning: why rural schools are at risk

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*A lightning strike can be fatal especially for people in poorly protected buildings. NET PHOTO*

Lightning has of late become a nightmare in Uganda, the majority of victims being school children. Tragedy befell Kiryandongo District when lightning hit Runyaanya Primary School, leaving 19 pupils dead and over 51 critically injured. The deceased have since been buried while the injured underwent medication at Kiryandongo and Mulago hospitals and they have been discharged.

In Hoima, 14 students of St Andrea SS were rushed to Bujumbura Cealth Centre after they were struck by lightning. They were left paralysed and in shock. They have since been discharged.

In Kasese, students at Bwera Primary Teachers College in Kasese District were left in panic when lightning struck a tree in front of the girls' dormitory. The incident has caused great panic and fear among students and teaching staff, much as none was injured in the strike.

Daily Monitor's investigations in the schools, which it sampled randomly, revealed clear lack of adequate safety measures to protect children against lightning.

None of the primary schools in Masindi District has lightning conductors. The Masindi district engineer, Mr Ramek Atungonza, revealed. Mr Atugonza, however, said all new buildings at health centres in the district have got lightning arrestors but he could not ascertain the real figures.

"I am not certain but I know all new buildings at health centres have them," he said.

The Masindi district education officer, Mr Francis Kyomuhendo said unless the government decides otherwise, the district has no capacity to install lightning conductors using UPE funds, because the money is little.

“We are waiting for a clear policy from the government about it,” he said. Usually, school children are found of playing in rain during heavy downpours, while others lack rubber shoes, which could lessen their risk of being struck by lightning. In Kibaale District, the Kagadi Town Council physical planner, Mr Zaidi Asaba, said it is a requirement by the Town Council authorities for all buildings to have lightning arrestors but regretted to note that many of them are yet to comply with the directive.

At Bishop Rwakaikara and Kagadi Model primary schools, the old buildings lacked arrestors, save for one newly constructed structure at Kagadi Model Primary School, which accommodates P5 and P4.

The Kibaale district education officer, Dr Cleophas Mugenyi, has directed all government-aided schools to procure arrestors using the UPE capitation grant.

While addressing mourners in Kiryandongo District recently, the State Minister of Primary Education, Dr Kamanda Bataringaya, described lightning as an international problem.

“We have heard of it in Nigeria and China, among other countries,” Dr Bataringaya, who delivered Shs200, 000 from government, to each bereaved family, said.

He urged all schools to install lightning arrestors on their structures. In Kasese, the Municipal Engineer, Appolo Bamwine, said only one building in the town has a lightning arrestor.

“After these incidents, some have started buying them, especially those with storied houses,” he reported. The Bwera Primary Teachers College Principal, Mr Patrick Okello, said much as the college has eight structures, it has only one lightning conductor at the laboratory.

The Director, Kings College Mubuku, Mr James Hakiza, said the school has bought six arrestors for the school. The school has over 600 students.

In Kabarole, the District Education Officer, Mr Christopher Balinda, confirmed to Daily Monitor that whenever it rains, teachers and children are in fear until it stops. He revealed that Kibiito Primary School in Bunyangabu County, had three arrestors, but they were stolen last month.

He appealed to the government to buy the gargets and supply them to schools because his department can’t afford. The Ntoroko District Engineer, Adolf Kahuma, said all schools in the district lack lightning arrestors.