# Lightning Fatalities Highlight Geology and Infrastructure Challenges in Zimbabwe - Zimbabwe <https://thebesanamail.com/2025/01/21/lightning-fatalities-highlight-geology-and-infrastructure-challenges-in-zimbabwe/> 21 January, 2025 By [Staff Reporter](https://thebesanamail.com/author/staff-reporter-2/)

**Binga** – On 25 December 2024 as the world was feasting and in the celebratory mood, Muleya family’s day ended in tragedy. In an incident that left the villagers of Siameja 3 village under Chief Saba in shock, a 10-year-old girl was struck and killed by lightning while sleeping home.

According to Matabeleland North Police Spokesperson Inspector Glory Banda, the deceased, Busalali Muleya, was sleeping in a bedroom hut with her four cousin brothers, aged 5, 11, 14, and 21, at the time of the incident.

“It started raining while they were sleeping, and they were awakened by the thunderous noise of the rain and the lightning that struck Busalali,” said Banda.

The victim’s grandmother, Violet Mudenda, who was in the kitchen, noticed white smoke emanating from one the bedroom hut. The surviving siblings ran out of the bedroom hut and met their grandmother outside. When they realised that the deceased was missing, alarmed, the grandmother quickly entered the hut and found Busalali’s lifeless body lying face down on the floor.

“No foul play is suspected,” Banda stated. “The deceased showed no visible injuries aside from struggle marks on her legs and hands, indicating that she fought for her life during the incident.”

The incident sent shockwaves through the community, while authorities urged people to take precautions during the rain season.

**The set record**

Zimbabwe is recorded in the Guinness Book of world records as the country where a single bolt of lightning killed the largest number of victims on 23 December 1975 when 21 people were struck dead. The incident occurred in a village near the eastern border town of Mutare while the victims were sheltering in a hut. The incident was recorded in a listing in the Guinness Book of World Records for 1977.

The dead included 14 children. Three people survived the incident. The total number of people killed by lightning in the country (then Rhodesia) since Oct. 1 of that year to December 23 was recorded at 53 — one of the worst periods on record.”

Rural areas often account for the majority of lightning-related fatalities and injuries nationwide. According to experts, tall structures in urban areas offer security for people inside because of their metal frames and specially built lightning conductors.

Most of the buildings and facilities in the rural areas are not lightning proof, leaving entire families, classrooms, and villagers constantly vulnerable. In particular, schools and homes tend to be mud-brick with thatch or sheet metal roofs held down by rocks.

**Science behind lightning**

Experts at Arizona State University working at the World Meteorological Organisation’s World Weather and Climate Extremes Archive say, lightning often causes keraunoparalysis, paralysis which may take minutes to hours to resolve, sometimes with permanent pain or weakness in the areas affected.

Keraunoparalysis can result in otherwise healthy people being unable to evacuate or escape while the thatch, often generations old and tinder dry, burns and falls on them, causing ‘charred bodies’.

During the 2023/24 rainy season in Zimbabwe, a family in south-eastern part of the country lost four children after their hut was struck by lightning during a thunderstorm. During the same period, another child was also killed in the northern Gokwe North district where heavy rains destroyed homes.

“Four children were struck by lightning while sleeping in their hut with their mother. The mother managed to escape the incident unhurt, but could not save her children,” a statement from the ministry said in a statement.

**Myths and superstitions**

A common myth is that lightning does not strike the same place twice. But, electrical engineers say, it does. Two or three times may be the case. or as many times.

Several lightning strikes during a storm in December 2015 forced a Hwange family to flee their house.The family’s home was quickly reduced to rubble and property was destroyed by three distinct lightning strikes. Another lightning strike had struck the same household in 2011.

Even more than 25 lightning strikes are possible. Every time a thunderstorm passes overhead, famous skyscrapers like New York City’s Empire State Building are almost certain to be struck by lightning; yet, they are equipped with lightning rods to ensure that the structure is unharmed. According to experts, lightning may and frequently does strike the same spot twice, particularly if it’s a tall, remote object.

Many superstitions have been sparked by Zimbabwe’s frequent lightning strikes, with some people thinking that lightning can be purposefully created and aimed at a specific target. A phenomenon that has not been proven, the majority of individuals accuse their neighbours and family members of transmitting human-created lighting out of jealously.

**Geology and lightning effects**

Max van Olst, then a lecturer in the University of Zimbabwe’s electrical engineering department, carried out a research on the phenomenon.

The [high lightning toll in Zimbabwe](https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-01-25-mn-5756-story.html" \t "_blank) can be explained by the prevalence of granite outcrops all over the country. According to research from the University of Zimbabwe, granite is radioactive and ionizes air molecules by releasing gamma rays into the sky.

Tall objects provide the simplest path for electrical discharges to get to the ground, while soot from the many kitchen huts and many granite outcrops provide the much-needed opposite charge on the ground.

“The frequency of lightning strikes in the Eastern Highlands can be explained by the combination of high altitude, high humidity, and high temperatures, which alter air density and, consequently, the ease with which lightning can occur,” the research found.