

Insurers Urged To Join In Lightning Safety Research Effort

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Lightning Protection Institute (LPI)

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NASHVILLE, April 5, 2010 ? The insurance industry was called on to actively participate in a lightning safety research initiative focusing on the possible hazards posed by a relatively new gas piping system used to transmit fuel gas within homes.

Insurers were urged to join in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) effort to study installation methods of Corrugated Stainless Steel Tubing (CSST), which has been found to be susceptible to damage from direct and nearby lightning strikes. CSST is a type of flexible piping that has been widely used in homes and commercial fuel gas applications in recent years. In some cases, lightning appears to have created holes in the CSST, allowing gas to leak and, consequently, resulting in house fires. Lightning problems associated with CSST received national attention in 2007, when Class Action litigation between property owners and CSST manufacturers was settled. The settlement provided vouchers for the installation of additional grounding and bonding measures to help mitigate potential hazards.

Speaking at the 78th annual joint conference of the Lightning Protection Institute (LPI) and United Lightning Protection Association (ULPA) here, Mitchell Guthrie, an independent engineering consultant, said the NFPA Research Foundation's initial effort has been to define the scope and preliminary work plan for the first phase of the research project to develop and validate installation methods for CSST piping.

Guthrie, who formerly served as chair of the NFPA Technical Committee on Lightning Protection and is an NFPA 780 representative on the NFPA Standards Council Task Group on CSST, explained that the research effort would include all types of structures and piping and would include focus on how lightning energy affects CSST.

He said the study also would include a literature review of incidents as well as applicable studies. A Request for Proposals is now out for review. ?We are looking for a broad range of stakeholders to participate in the NFPA Research Foundation project, including manufacturers, installers, contractors, the propane industry, fire safety experts, lightning consultants and the insurance industry,? Guthrie said.

Insurance loss data associated with structures equipped with CSST would be helpful to the NFPA's review. (It is estimated that more than a million US properties currently contain CSST piping.) The Lightning Safety Alliance (LSA), an industry group based in Connecticut, has conducted detailed technical reviews at the sites of five CSST incidents and two sites where CSST was installed but there was no incident. ?We are making progress, but do not have all the answers,? Guthrie said.

The LPI is a not-for-profit, nationwide group founded in 1955 to promote lightning safety, awareness and protection education. The organization provides a certification program to qualify competence in lightning

protection installation, design and inspection. The LPI offers a list of certified contractors across the United States. Visit the LPI Web site for more information about lightning protection.

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