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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 7, 2017

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Public safety personnel endorse lightning protection

MURPHY (July 7, 2017) So far this year, there have been some close calls, but no home or structure fires have been reported as a result of lightning strikes. Nevertheless, Murphy's public safety personnel urge residents to become familiar with ways to protect themselves and their property from lightning damage.

"Prior to my arrival here, there were a few residential fires due to lightning strikes," says Fire Chief Del Albright. "Throughout my career, I've seen my share of these. The damage can range from relatively minor to catastrophic."

Lightning is likely the most dangerous and most-frequently encountered weather hazard that people experience, according to the National Severe Storm Laboratory. And, because a single bolt of lightning can carry over 100 million volts of electricity, it's not surprising that it can cause damage to homes in a number of ways.

For example, a direct strike can rip through roofs and chimneys, explode brick and concrete, and ignite fires. An indirect or secondary lightning strike to a nearby tree or power line can induce unwanted surges into a home.

Lightning can also enter through phone, cable lines, and computer modems, as well as roof projections such as weather vanes, antennas and satellite dishes. Irrigation systems, invisible fences, and electric gates can also provide a pathway for lightning's destructive energy.

"Installing a certified lightning protection system is the best way to deal with this issue," says Albright. "They don't prevent strikes, but they provide a safe path for the current to be directed to the ground where it will dissipate."

Adding such a system to a home is generally not a do-it-yourself project. Reputable installation contractors are certified by Underwriters Laboratories and the Lightning Protection Institute in coordination with the National Fire Protection Association.

Basic components of a system include several air terminals, called lightning rods, and conductors made of braided copper or aluminum cables that carry the charge to the ground terminators, which are buried at least ten feet into the ground. Also, a matrix of conducting bonds to ensure lightning does not jump from one object to another, and large-scale surge protectors in the main electrical panels to prevent over-voltages, leading to electrical fires, as well as damage to electrical appliances.

"Trees taller than the roofline, which is common in Murphy, makes them susceptible to a strike," said the Chief. "Should a tree catch fire or fall as a result of a strike, it can be just as destructive as if the house itself was hit. Many installation contractors advise homeowners with tall trees to protect their trees with simpler systems."

An internet search of lightning protection companies can provide information on certification, cost and availability.

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ABOUT MURPHY -- Murphy is a fast-growing community located in Collin County. The population is approximately 19,330, generally characterized as highly educated with a median household income above the state average. With more than 70 percent of the land developed, the community is dominated by single-family residences. City planners strive to preserve a country feel while exhibiting an aggressive economic development stance. Money Magazine has dubbed Murphy as the 27th Best Place to Live in America for small cities, and D Magazine placed Murphy as the fifth best suburb in the 2014 list, where it has consistently ranked in the top 10.