

Exotic Lightning Protection / Prevention Devices

by Jeffrey A. Harger

Recent actions by the Standards Council of the National Fire Protection Association are worthy of sharing with the membership. We know that several courses where members have elected to have special lightning protection devices installed on their club houses, in trees or on flag poles. The decision by the NFPA may be of some interest to those clubs as well as others who are contemplating spending several thousands of dollars on devices that may not perform as advertised.

On July 18th, 1995 the Standards Council held a hearing to consider the further processing of proposed standard 781, *Standard for Lightning Protection Using Early Streamer Emission (ESE) Air Terminals*. ESE Air Terminals are devices which supposedly attract lightning strikes over an extended distance, thereby in theory, leaving a larger radius around the device safe from damage. ESE devices come in many shapes and sizes, but generally make the same claims. In the protection of a building, the theory is that they replace several if not hundreds of conventional air terminals. On a golf course, we hear claims of protection of several fairways with a single device.

Before the final decision was made, the Standards Council arranged for a third party review by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). After carefully considering the NIST report and all information

available, the Standards Council, noting the absence of reliable evidence that Early Streamer Emission Air Terminals provided the increased coverage claimed, voted not to issue the proposed NFPA 781 document and discharged the technical committee on this subject.

After we reviewed the same documents, it is our opinion that the only documents provided by the ESE supporters were documents prepared by either the manufacturers of these devices or by individuals who had financial interests in the passage of such a standard. The most defining statement in the entire NIST report is as follows: *"There is no indisputable evidence from literature that the range of protection provided by a single ESE terminal can be greater than or necessarily the same as the range provided by two or more conventional air terminals of the same height with overlapping zones of protection."*

Based on this statement and many others in the report, our recommendation would be to thoroughly investigate all of the issues relating to these devices before spending sometimes up to \$30,000.00 for the installation of devices that appear not to work as well as stated. Until the National Fire Protection Association or Underwriters Laboratories has a standard regarding their specific installation, it may be money well spent to just stay with conventional systems that have been reviewed and updated by these organizations since the early 1900's.

Please feel free to call if you have any questions or if you would like to discuss this topic further. We would be more than happy to share any of the information we have with the membership.

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