

Lookout Show`n Tell #13 – Lightning Protection at Lookouts

Beginning in the early 1930s, all fire lookouts were equipped with lightning protection consisting of a "bird cage" of No.2 (1/4") solid copper wire extending from the roof peak, down all four corners, and down the hill perhaps a hundred yards to dissipate the static charge. Although many LOs get direct lightning hits several times a year, there have been no known fatalities by lightning in a properly maintained LO since.

The lightning stool or proverbial "Hot Seat" was designed simply and may be found in many forms, using telephone insulators on the feet. It was intended to be stood on during a storm when you needed to use the land line phone or radio. Some today say you should perch your toes on it like an eagle through the entire overhead attack. Others say it's useless. You can be the judge...



Lightning Stool

The lower two pictures show a couple of copper lightning rods from LO roof tops. Both were damaged by direct lightning strikes. One shows several small arc beads on its tip. I can attest to the fact that this one did some damage at Heavens Gate LO, Idaho in 1988. I was there. The direct hit wiped out all 6 radios, the propane fridge, and bit my dog on the nose! The system was maintained properly, supposedly.



Lightning Hot Seat & Damaged Lightning Rods



LO Lightning Air Terminal FT7

This burnt air terminal wasn't so lucky. Its electrical connections hadn't been properly maintained, and a direct strike burnt down the lookout at Simmons Ridge, Idaho.



Burnt Lightning Air Terminal 2

**Ray Kresek
Fire Lookout Museum
Spokane, WA**