



CARIBBEAN METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

PRESS RELEASE

Lightning Specialists Gather across Continents to Help Build Lightning Safe Communities during CMO/WMO Virtual Symposium

For Immediate Release

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, May 31, 2021—The first-ever [*Symposium on Lightning and Lightning Safety Awareness*](#), hosted jointly by the [Caribbean Meteorological Organization](#) (CMO) and the [World Meteorological Organization](#) (WMO) on May 19-20, brought together lightning specialists from a wide range of disciplines. The event was part of CMO's initiative to foster collaboration to better understand lightning risk and improve safety in the Caribbean and the Inter-Americas to reduce lightning deaths, injuries, and property damage.

"The symposium was a pioneering forum for exchanging information and resources on lightning and its impacts" said Dr. Arlene Laing, Coordinating Director of the CMO Headquarters and organizer of the event. "With support from the WMO, we were able to bring together specialists from across the world to share presentations about lightning safety education and awareness, medical impacts of lightning and injury prevention, lightning protection measures, weather forecast applications, lightning detection, and lightning as an essential climate variable," explained Laing.

The two-day forum featured seven blocks of [learning sessions](#) with 19 presentations of information designed to help Caribbean decision-makers and forecasters broaden their perspective about lightning. Symposium attendees included officials from National Meteorological Services, disasters and emergency management agencies, as well as representatives from aviation, the media, agriculture, fisheries, energy/power generation, outdoor recreation, youth sports, tourism, and climate research.

"The work sponsored by WMO and CMO's joint effort has led to understanding about lightning that would not have been possible without the collaboration of experts from science strategy, meteorology, medicine, education, lightning protection, disaster risk prevention, and physics, and climatology," said symposium presenter, Dr. José Tamayo, Coordinator of the Conference of Ibero-American Directors of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (CIMHET). "I was honored to partner with lightning specialists from around the globe to advance science and safety across borders." (*The Lightning Network for Central America has been a sustained cooperation effort of the National Meteorological Services from the region with the support of AEMET to address the need of more tools to increase people safety specially in the most vulnerable zones*).

For many, the symposium collaboration provided exposure to new realms of lightning safety, science and education. Gillian Richards of the Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority, which has had to ground flights because of lightning strikes in Jamaica, noted, "The information shared has been quite useful. Well done."

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"I thoroughly enjoyed the recent Symposium on Lightning and Lightning Safety Awareness! I learned about the range of lightning detection technology and lightning data services currently on the market, which is very important to me at the moment as I develop the meteorological infrastructure and services in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The application of lightning data to tropical cyclone forecasting also proved very interesting to me and will be very useful knowledge to apply during the upcoming hurricane season," said Dr Holly Hamilton, Director of Meteorology at the Turks and Caicos Island Airport Authority.

"While COVID-19 prevented the opportunity for face-to-face exchange, it didn't diminish our spirit or pursuit of our mission to connect with experts to improve our understanding of lightning and lightning safety," said Laing. "Thanks to the support of the WMO, and gifts of talent shared by our presenters, we were able to provide a robust platform on an international scale to help build lightning safe communities." Mr Rodney Martinez Güingla, the WMO Representative for North America, Central America, and the Caribbean, noted that, "The Symposium is part of WMO's commitment to building partnerships among operational and research communities, public and private sector stakeholders, and the general public to save lives and reduce the economic impact of natural hazards."

As follow-up to the symposium, the CMO will issue a post-event survey to assess the change in level of knowledge and understanding that participants took away from the virtual forum. Additionally, on 28th May, the Coordinating Director presented the Caribbean perspective at the international conference on "[Preparing for International Lightning Safety Day 2021](#)", a day that is observed annually on 28 June.

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About the CMO

The [Caribbean Meteorological Organization](#) is a specialized agency of the Caribbean Community that coordinates the joint scientific and technical activities in weather, climate, and water - related sciences in sixteen (16) English-speaking Caribbean countries (Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands). It originated from the British Caribbean Meteorological Service, which was founded in 1951.

About the WMO

The World Meteorological Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) with 193 Member States and Territories. It is the UN system's authoritative voice on the state and behaviour of the Earth's atmosphere, its interaction with the land and oceans, the weather and climate it produces and the resulting distribution of water resources.