Electrical storms – phone use

1. Electrical storms and risk to people
Electrical storms present a special risk owing to their high voltage and unpredictable pathway of lightning strikes. They can present people with the risk of electric shock or electrocution. Staff, supervisors and students must exercise a high degree of caution to minimize the health and safety risks associated with an electrical storm.

Information about the onset and presence of electrical storm activity can be viewed via the Energex lightning tracker and storm alerts web page: https://www.energex.com.au/safety/power-outage-safety/weather-centre

2. Risk management for electrical storms
During electrical storms staff and students should avoid using:
- fixed-line phones
- headsets attached to fixed-line phones
- phone teleconference units
- cordless phones that are in contact with the base units
- faxes

Mobile phones can be used during an electrical storm provided that the phone isn’t connected to a charger device.

In the case that a fixed-line phone must be used by staff or students during an electrical storm, they should exercise caution by keeping the call as brief as possible.

Business units with advertised key service lines should consider diverting fixed-line phones to voicemail during an electrical storm, and call centres using fixed-line phones should consider activation of an automated voice message stating “There is currently an electrical storm in the vicinity of the operator – please call back later”.

If you need to arrange activation of voicemail or of an automated voice message for this purpose, please contact ITS telephone helpline on 3365 1000.
Acoustic shock and headset protective devices
Lightning events can present the risk of acoustic shock\(^1\) to people using headsets attached to fixed-line phones. Acoustic shock protection headsets should be fitted to the headsets for this reason. The headsets are available for purchase at a scheduled cost by contacting the UQ ITS telephone helpline on 3365 1000.

*It must be noted that these headsets are not intended to allow people to continue to use their fixed line phone service during a lightning storm.*

General safety
During electrical storms people should avoid:
- Carrying metallic objects such as umbrellas and metallic jewellery (particularly on the upper body)
- Touching metal fixtures or brick or concrete walls
- Standing in bare feet on uncovered concrete floors

References and relevant links:
The Australian Lightning Protection Standard (AS1768)
WHSQ Electrical safety during storms:

\(^1\) Acoustic shriek / burst protection
This is intended to protect against sudden *unexpected* damaging loud acoustic bursts, which in some cases could come from lightning. It is not intended however, to allow people to continue to use their fixed line service phone during a lightning storm. The *ITS Catalogue of Standard Telephone Equipment and Services* has a Headset with Acoustic Shock Protection.