

Partner Spotlight | Kimberly (Kim) LOEHR

In honor of *Lightning Safety Awareness Month*, FLASH invited Kim Loehr of the Lightning Protection Institute (LPI) to share her journey in the field of lightning protection.

As LPI's Communications Director, Kim wields her influence as an award-winning, Radford University-educated journalist to capture attention for the lightning safety movement. She represents the industry at national mitigation conferences and partnership events. Kim is past president of the United Lightning Protection Association (ULPA), a board member for the Lightning Safety Alliance (LSA), and a registered provider for LSA's national Continuing Education Service (CES). Recently, she became a member of the Home Builders Association of Richmond, VA. She also serves on the Community and Government Affairs Committee of the AIA Richmond.

As a partnership member of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/National Weather Service (NOAA/NWS) Lightning Safety Awareness Team, Kim assisted with the *National Lightning Safety Awareness Week* campaign among other team initiatives. NOAA honored her with a Certificate of Appreciation in 2009 for "Personal dedication and outstanding contributions to the National Weather Service's Lightning Safety Awareness efforts." As a member of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the Building Fire Safety Systems Section, she shares industry insights as a "Forum" contributor for the NFPA Journal.

FLASH: Kim, your professional and personal track record is impressive. With so much on your plate, how did you get involved with FLASH?

LOEHR: LPI was exhibiting at a risk management conference in Tampa, FL. Conference attendees kept asking if we were affiliated with FLASH or familiar with the great work it was doing in the realm of disaster preparedness and safety. On the last day of the conference, I met FLASH EVP Eric Vaughn and got his business card.

I followed up with Eric and invited Leslie to speak at the Annual LPI/ULPA Lightning Protection Conference in New Orleans, where she shared information about her organization with our members. After that, Leslie and I continued to correspond. We began to work jointly to extend support for the NOAA/NWS Lightning Safety Awareness Week campaign, an initiative I was already supporting in conjunction with my service on the NOAA/NWS LSA Team.

Leslie suggested that FLASH and LPI sponsor a joint LSA Week event, which we held with area Girl Scouts at the Orlando Zoo to promote public awareness about lightning safety and lightning protection. We followed the zoo LSA kickoff with the signing of a partnership agreement, a display of the "lightning safety demo house," and a group tour of *StormStruck: A Tale of Two Homes*[®] in INNOVENTIONS at Epcot. Since then our organizations have been attending conferences and other national events together with like-minded partners such as NOAA/NWS and the I.I.I. to increase awareness for lightning safety and lightning protection.

FLASH: Kim, how did you get interested in disaster safety?

I was born into a family that is very disaster-safety minded. My father worked for his uncle who owned a lightning protection business before striking out (no pun intended!) to start his own company in 1947. My father's knowledge of lightning helped instill a serious respect for lightning's power and its dangers.

Growing up in the 60s and 70s, my siblings and I knew to never play outdoors in a lightning storm. Dad was super strict about it. I remember the time my younger brother was punished when he decided to take a walk with an umbrella to the neighborhood creek during a thunderstorm. My father gave all five of us kids a long lecture on the dangers of lightning that day. I suppose my dad, who passed away in 1980, would have been a big fan of Leon Lightning Lion, our "When thunder roars, go indoors!" lightning safety mascot.

I wrote about my experience of growing up in a family fascinated with lightning in a blog last month that you can read at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/churches-attracting-more-lightning-than-sinners-how-protection-loehr>

FLASH: Yes, that is a wonderful blog! Readers can go to the following link to read all of Kim's blogs: www.lightning.org/blog. What do you see as the future of resilient building? What do you think is moving the cause of resilience forward?

LOEHR: I hope the future will unveil ideas and solutions that I cannot even begin to imagine right now! In general, I expect that resilient building will become all about holistic thinking, about viewing resilience from a total "systems" approach.

My middle son, Joey, who just graduated with a degree in Urban Design and Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), said in a recent discussion we had about resiliency that he was brimming with ideas for cities and buildings of the future. While "resiliency" isn't a word he throws around a lot in discussions, he did share a perspective about the importance of "adaptability." He believes we will see more of a focus on building components or systems that adapt or adjust to the environment. This could be something as simple as standard implementation of automatic lighting and temperature control, which we are already seeing, or complex innovations for disaster preparedness features that provide livable conditions after an extreme weather or emergency event. In the future, I suspect we will have more streamlined access to emergency resources for back-up power, water, lighting, air purification, and the like.

Since young adults are the future, I enjoyed initiating a discussion on this topic and then sitting back to listen to what my son had to say. His classroom experiences have been so different from mine, and his projects at VCU exceeded norms of the past.

I think the desire for a more holistic approach to threats of the future—and not just designing for past disasters—is moving resilience forward. There is a focused mindset to make smart decisions about how to positively impact our already over-stressed environment. I think the designers of the future will take us into uncharted territory where resiliency can be addressed in thrifty ways that add true value.



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FLASH: New discoveries and developments are emerging every day. Is there a specific project you are working on right now, something you are passionate about in the resilience field?

LOEHR: I am certainly passionate about our campaign for Lightning Safety Awareness Week that is held annually during the last full week of June. NOAA started the LSA campaign in 2001, leading the effort for personal safety. LPI joined the effort, and I joined the LSA Team in 2007. The campaign has been instrumental in helping to reduce lightning deaths in the U.S.—so much so that in 2013 we set a new record for the fewest lightning deaths (23) in a year. This was a huge success compared with the deadliest year for lightning strikes, which was 1943 when 432 Americans were struck and killed. In recent years, LPI has helped expand the campaign by emphasizing protection for people, property, and places through our “Building Lightning Safe Communities” initiative.

Most recently, I’ve been working on the “Build & Protect” campaign, which LPI initiated to raise awareness within the architect and engineering communities. We want to let designers and planners know that LPI is their go-to place for resources related to safety-standard-compliant lightning protection systems (LPS).

Building codes set minimum standards that may, or may not, include LPS. By including LPS in owner checklists, designers can deliver a higher level of quality assurance and value engineering for building resilience. When we “Build & Protect” with LPS—for example, by protecting smart structures from surge interruptions and downtime, or adding LPS on Green and LEED structures as a building resiliency measure—we add a safe and effective structural amenity that protects against a leading cause of property damage.

FLASH: Do you have any other comments or words of wisdom to share?

LOEHR: Yes! Above all, I want to remind your readers not to be apathetic about lightning. Even though a single strike can carry up to 300 million volts of electricity and 30,000 amps, lightning remains an underrated threat in terms of severe weather hazards. As the weather peril that affects most people most of the time in the U.S., seeing and experiencing lightning can lead to apathy and poor safety habits in hazardous conditions. Most people who are killed or injured by lightning are typically steps away from a safe place such as an enclosed car, a building, or a home. We want to remind people that LPS makes those safe structures safer! Lightning damage is responsible for approximately \$1 billion in homeowner insurance claims in the U.S. annually, so LPS integration in the building process offers a significant, cost effective solution to this problem. No one wants to be a lightning statistic. I urge your readers to heed the words of our safety mascot, Leon the Lightning Lion: “When thunder roars, go indoors!”