

Lightning strikes cause immediate, delayed damage

By BRIAN WALKER/Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, August 9, 2016 12:00 am

Lori Wallin originally thought she had heard an explosive.

But after peeking outside, she discovered her 100-foot spruce tree had been split by Sunday afternoon's lightning storm.

"It sounded like a bomb went off," said Wallin, who lives in the 900 block of north Sixth Street in Coeur d'Alene.

"Then my friend, who was sitting in the upstairs living room, said 'Your tree just went down.'

"There were tree parts all over the place. It rattled the windows of the house and shut things down."

Two large portions of the tree, which is on the property line, fell. One downed tree section damaged the fence, deck and gutters to the vacant rental property next door. The other landed in Wallin's yard.

Wallin said the power surge also damaged some electronics inside her home that will be covered by insurance.

She said the tree will likely have to be cut down due to the damage.

"It's the tallest tree in the neighborhood, so I suppose that is why it got it," she said. "I love that tree, but more than likely we will likely have to take it all the way down."

A neighbor of Wallin's, who declined to be identified, said the incident caused a "blinding flash."

"It was louder than a transformer being hit," he said,

adding residents in the area could smell the tree after it had been split apart.

The lightning strikes that swept through the area Sunday caused damage in other parts of the county as well.

Fire crews responded to three small fires in the Post Falls area believed to have been started by lightning strikes on Sunday afternoon.

The fires were in the 15200 block of Riverview Drive, on Nelson Loop in the Hauser area and at 869 S. Breezy Way on the north side of the Spokane River near McGuire Road.

Steven Isaacson, Kootenai County Fire and Rescue EMS division chief, said the Idaho Department of Lands assisted on the Riverview call as the fire area was difficult to reach due to rough terrain.

"We couldn't get a truck to it because it was on a rocky hillside, so it was difficult to fight," Isaacson said. "Firefighters had to walk down with water on their backs and hand tools."

Isaacson said it's not unusual for lightning-caused fires to be visible for a day or two after the storm.



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CONTINUED—"Lightning can cause fire under the trees or in the root system so it can fester until it grows and anything is visible," Isaacson said.

Crews hiked into rugged terrain off Highway 53 in Rathdrum Monday afternoon to stop a small ground fire from racing up the hill toward homes.

"Folks up on Hidden Valley (Road) were apprised of the situation," said Jim Lyon, spokesman for Northern Lakes Fire, one of several agencies on the scene.

The fire, which spread to an acre, was under control by 3:15 p.m.

"It's just pretty rugged up here, so they're walking in and they've got tenders up here on top," Lyon said.

Crews from the Idaho Department of Lands, Spirit Lake Fire, Northern Lakes Fire and Kootenai County Fire and Rescue responded.

The cause of the fire, Lyon said, was lightning striking a tree.