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# Influence of a single lightning on the intensity of an air electric field and acoustic emission of near surface rocks

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## Abstract

The effect of a single lightning discharge on electric field intensity in the near ground atmosphere was investigated. The effect appeared as a sharp fall of electric field potential gradient from  $80 \text{ V m}^{-1}$  up to  $-21 \text{ V m}^{-1}$ . The process of intensity recovery is described by flat capacitor model with characteristic time of recovery of 17 c. Simultaneously with electric field, the acoustic emission response in the near surface rocks on lightning discharge was registered in the frequency range of 6.5–11 kHz.

## 1 Introduction

In spite of a long period of investigation of lightning processes, scientific interest to these phenomena has not vanished. The exception at the present moment conception, that the Earth electrostatic charge is formed by planetary lightning activity, requires more detailed consideration of discharge and charge transition processes in a cloud. In the paper the process of response in electric field intensity of the near ground air and in acoustic emission on a single lightning discharge is studied.

The peculiarity of atmosphere electric state in Kamchatka is a small number of lightnings. Cold climate does not allow ground surface to warm up. There are no large temperature vertical gradients in the atmosphere and, consequently, the conditions for appearance of lightning clouds are very rare. According to official data from 1937 to 1982 (45 yr) only 22 lightnings were registered (Kondratuk, 1983). On 2 October 2008 a unique for this region event occurred. At 17:46 LT (04:46 UT) a single lightning discharge not accompanied by precipitation occurred. The reaction on this discharge was observed at “Paratunka” observatory in electric field and in acoustic emission. In the paper (Mikhailov et al., 2005) it was shown that during precipitation the atmospheric noise level in electric signal increases by two orders in comparison to changes in “fair weather” conditions. In this case all the physical values were measured when there was no precipitation which allowed us to measure fields as they are. Moreover the

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cloud cover on that day was not continuous but there were big cumulus clouds. Electro impulse effect on acoustic emission activity was earlier studied on geomaterial examples (Sobolev and Ponomarev, 2003; Sobolev et al., 2000; Bogomolov et al., 2004; Zucupin et al., 2006), and on rocks under the effect of MHD impulses (Tarasov, 1997; Tarasov et al., 1999; Tarasov and Tarasova, 2004). In the present study the increase of emission level in the range of 6.5–11 kHz in sedimentary rocks under the influence of a lightning discharge was registered for the first time.

## 2 Measurement technique

Observations were carried out in Kamchatka at “Paratunka” observatory, IKIR FEB RAS, ( $\lambda = 158.25^\circ$  E;  $\varphi = 52.9^\circ$  N). Electric field intensity measurements were realized by “Pole-2” electrostatic fluxmeter, developed in a Branch of Voeikov Main Geophysical Observatory, Scientific Research Center of Atmosphere Remote Sensing (Imyntov, 1957). “Pole-2” was installed on a proof ground at the height of 3 m at the distance of 200 m from the administrative building (Fig. 1).

The area around it is cleared from trees with the radius of 12 m. The construction of sensor installation is so that the leveled surfaces of electric field intensity at the measurement point are parallel to the Earth surface (Fig. 2).

The principle of operation of “Pole-2” instrumentation is the following. Electric field intensity is transformed into electric current by rotary electrostatic generator, which operates on the basis of electrostatic induction. Electrostatic induction current of the measured field induce electric charge on a measuring plate. Modulator, the shielding plate, periodically shields the measuring plate in electric field, in the result of which the value of the induced charge periodically changes. The charge accumulating and draining from the plate generates current in the load circuit. The current amplitude is proportional to the measured electric field intensity, to the rotation frequency of modulation plate and to the area of measuring plate; and the phase is determined by the electric field direction near the measuring plate surface. After digitizing by 14-bit ADC

with 1 s sampling frequency, the signal at fluxmeter output is recorded on a hard disk of a PC.

Acoustic emission (AE) registration was carried out by a hydro-acoustic receiver (hydrophone) with the sensitivity of about hundreds of mV/Pa together with embedded preamplifier; the receiver is installed in an artificial pool at the distance of 54 m from the electric field sensor. The pit of  $1 \times 1 \times 1$  was made in near surface rocks and filled with water. Application of the hydrophone installed in a pool allowed us to register geoacoustic signal in the range of 0.1 Hz–11 kHz, which is greater than ordinary seismometers. Signals from the hydrophone after being digitized by 16-order ADC with 44 100 Hz frequency rate are recorded on a hard disk of a PC. Then we carry out filtration at the frequency ranges: 0.1–10, 30–60, 70–200, 200–600, 600–2000, 2000–6500, 6500–11 000 Hz, detection and storage with 4 s time slot (Kuptsov, 2005). The analyzed value is summary 4 s acoustic pressure  $P_s$  at every frequency channel. The performed investigations stated that under the influence of deformations of the order  $\sim 10^{-7}$  (Dolgikh et al., 2007) increase of emission activity is observed in the frequency range of first kilohertz which coincides with source scales of  $10^{-1}$ –1 m (Kuptsov et al., 2005). This effect is the most vividly observed during strong earthquake preparation, 1–3 days before an event (Kuptsov et al., 2005).

Weather parameter control is carried out by a digital meteo-station WS-2000. Magnetic field  $H$ ,  $D$ ,  $Z$  components were measured by a fluxgate magnetometer FRG with the accuracy of 0.01 nT and 1 s sampling frequency. Time synchronization was made by GPS receiver.

### 3 Main results and discussion

On 2 October 2008 in the region of the observatory there was changeable cloudiness with big cumulus clouds. Precipitation was not observed from 14:00 to 19:00 LT (UT+13 h). From a cloud, which, appeared to pass over a mountain top, a single lightning discharge occurred. There were no subsequent discharges. The lightning

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discharge caused a sharp fall of electric field potential gradient from  $80 \text{ V m}^{-1}$  to  $-21 \text{ V m}^{-1}$ , followed by a smooth recovery up to the value of  $70 \text{ V m}^{-1}$  (Fig. 3). Air electroconductivity changed weakly and was about  $4 \times 10^{-15} \text{ 1/(Ohm*m)}$ . Conduction current density changed from the value of  $-2 \times 10^{-13}$  to  $+6 \times 10^{-13} \text{ A m}^{-2}$ . Magnetic field change in all the tree components, which were measured by fluxgate magnetometer with 1 s interval during lightning discharge, was not registered.

During a lightning a charge of 20–30 coulombs takes place with every lightning stroke (Feynman et al., 1964). Recovery occurs according to the same law as capacitor charge recovery. Here one may observe a sudden field fall followed by exponential return to its initial value with characteristic time constant of the order of 5 s changing from time to time (Feynman et al., 1964). When studying Ground-Cloud discharges the form of charge recovery is commonly calculated by the formula, suggested by Kazemir (Chalmers, 1967):

$$Ez(t) = Ez1 \times \exp(-t/\tau) + Ez2 \times (1 - \exp(-t/\tau)) \quad (1)$$

where  $Ez(t)$  is electric field potential gradient,  $Ez1$  is its value right after lightning discharge,  $Ez2$  is its value after the recovery. It determines the time of atmosphere relaxation near ground surface. According to the method of the least squares with mean squared error 0.2 the numerical values were determined by this formula:

$$Ez(t) = -19.5 \times \exp(-t/17.1) + 69.1 \times (1 - \exp(-t/17.1)) \quad (2)$$

Thus, charge in the cloud recovered with the characteristic time of relaxation  $\tau = 17 \text{ s}$ .  $Ez1$  corresponds to the surface density of charge on the ground. If we imagine cloud-ground system as a capacitor, in this case  $\tau$  has physical meaning as  $\tau = RC$ , where  $R$  is resistance and  $C$  is capacitor capacity. Relaxation time  $\tau$  is also determined by ion mobility. Usually its average value in the regions with high lightning activity is about 7 s (Chalmers, 1967).

Figure 4 shows a plot of measured values and approximated curve (relaxation curve). The fact that intensity drop, contrary to the model, occurred not to zero value but to the value of  $-21 \text{ V m}^{-1}$  indicates non-nil value of surface charge density.

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electromagnetic fields was revealed. Characteristic scales of AE sources in the case were of the order of  $10^{-3}$ – $10^{-2}$  m.

Similar results of energy effect on rocks were obtained in natural conditions when using MHD generators at Garmsk and Bishkek proof grounds (Tarasov, 1997; Tarasov et al., 1999; Tarasov and Tarasova, 2004). It was established that after the onset of electric impulses from MHD generator, weak seismicity (with energy class  $K \leq 6$ ) on the proof grounds noticeably increased. It should be noted, that the characteristic scales of sources in these experiments differed considerably from the listed above laboratory ones and were of the order of  $10^3$  m.

Acoustic emission response registered in the experiment corresponds to the results of laboratory and natural tests described above. As long as the response is observed only in the range of 6.5–11 kHz, we may suggest characteristic size of sources of  $10^{-1}$  m. It is 1 order as much as in the laboratory tests and 4 orders less than natural tests; similar effects have not been observed on such scales before. In this case the increase of acoustic emission activity under the influence of electric impulse has been registered for the first time in natural conditions during lightning discharge. Lightning discharge energy was estimated to be  $10^9$ – $10^{10}$  J according to the paper (Rakov and Uman, 2003). Assuming that energy fall occurs according to the law of  $1/r^2$ , we may evaluate its value at the observation point as not less than  $10^1$  J. It is 4 orders as much as the value of total electric energy when acoustic emission activity increase was observed in laboratory experiments (Sobolev and Ponomarev, 2003; Sobolev et al., 2000).

## 4 Conclusions

In the result of observation of a single lightning discharge during the absence of any precipitation the following effects were discovered:

1. Sharp fall of potential gradient of electric field intensity in the air at the height of 3 m from  $80 \text{ V m}^{-1}$  to  $-21 \text{ V m}^{-1}$ . Then the field recovered its level up to the

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value of  $70 \text{ V m}^{-1}$  with characteristic time of relaxation of 17 s. The process of field recovery is approximated by the formula  $Ez(t) = -19.5 \times \exp(-t/17.1) + 69.1 \times (1 - \exp(-/17.1))$  with mean squared error of 0.2. Field intensity of  $21 \text{ V m}^{-1}$  is determined by surface charge density on the ground.

5 2. 10 s acoustic emission response in the frequency range of 6.5–11 KHz on impulse electric effect was registered for the first time.

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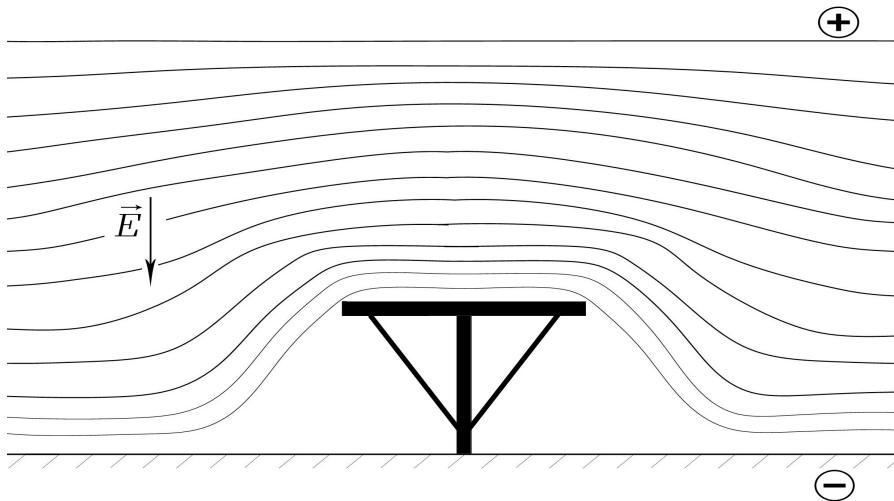


**Fig. 1.** “Pole-2” instrument setup at observatory proof ground.

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**Fig. 2.** Leveled surfaces of electric field intensity within the area of sensor installation.

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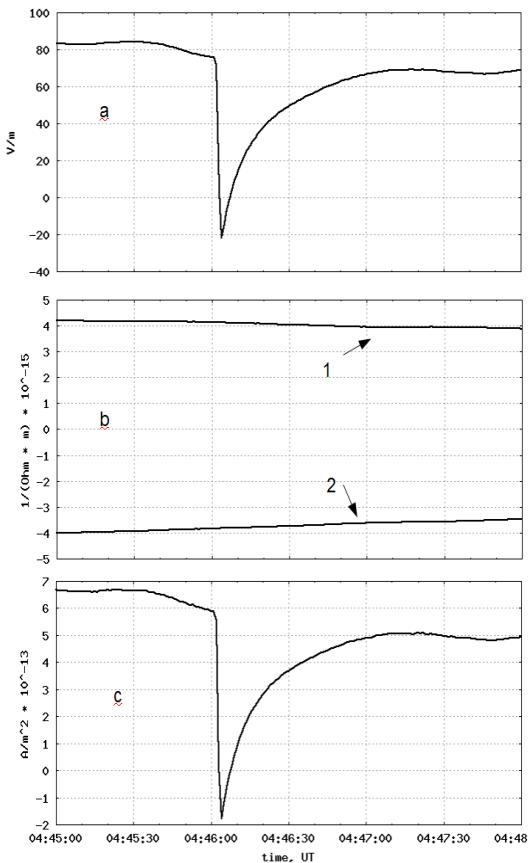
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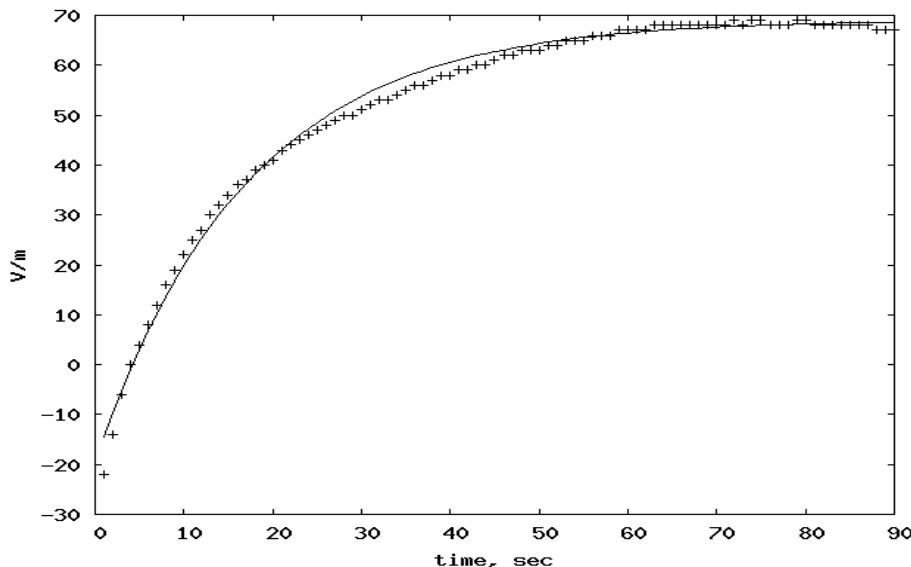
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**Fig. 3.** Plot of field pattern during lightning discharge on 2 October 2008: **(a)** electric field potential gradient in the near ground air; **(b)** air electroconductivity caused by 1-negative ions and 2-positive ions with factor (-1); **(c)** conduction current density.

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**Fig. 4.** Field recovery plot after lightning discharge (crosses) and approximation by the formula (2) (line).

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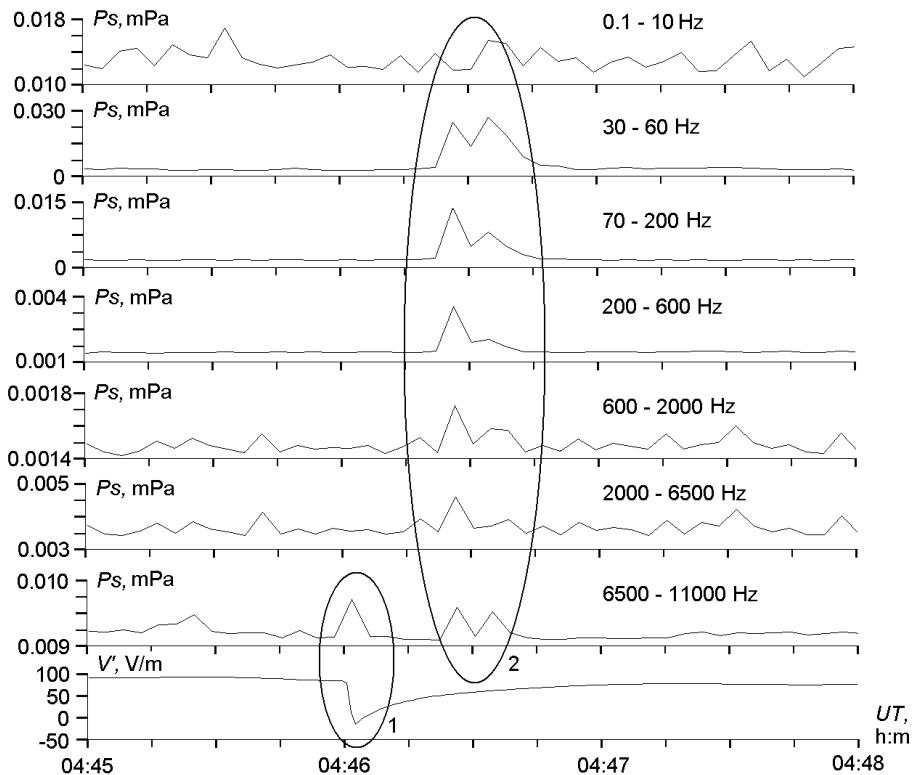
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**Fig. 5.** Acoustic emission plots in seven frequency ranges and potential gradient of electric field intensity in the near ground air (in the bottom) during the lightning discharge on 2 October 2008.

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