

The Safety Site

Recreational Safety takes Responsibility & Control

by Monica Palmer

Lightning Safety

Understanding the Lightning Threat: There is no safe place outside when thunderstorms are in the area. If you hear thunder, you are likely within striking distance of the storm. Just remember, “***When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors.***” Too many people wait far too long to get to a safe place when thunderstorms approach. Unfortunately, these delayed actions lead to many of the lightning deaths and injuries in the U.S.

The best way to protect yourself from lightning is to avoid the threat. You simply don't want to be caught outside in a storm. Have a lightning safety plan, and cancel or postpone activities early if thunderstorms are expected. Monitor weather conditions and get to a safe place before the weather becomes threatening. Substantial buildings and hard-topped vehicles are safe options. Rain shelters, small sheds, and open vehicles are not safe.

When inside, do not touch anything that is plugged into an electrical outlet, plumbing, and corded phones. Cell phones and cordless phones are safe. Also, keep away from outside doors and windows and do not lie on a garage floor.

Understanding the Threat: The threat of lightning increases as a thunderstorm approaches, reaches a peak when the storm is overhead, and then gradually diminishes as the storm moves away. At the same time, it's people's behavior that determines the risk of a fatal lightning strike. While some people move inside at the first signs of a thunderstorm, many people wait far too long to get to a safe place. Some wait until the thunderstorm is overhead and it starts to rain. Others, due to poor planning, are caught outside and can't get to a safe place. Although most people get inside, some put themselves at risk by touching items that could become electrified by a nearby lightning strike. Finally, many people go outside too soon after the storm has seemingly passed, often only waiting for the rain to become lighter or end. It is all of these unsafe behaviors that put people at risk when thunderstorms are in the area.

Minimizing The Risk: To minimize your personal risk of being struck by lightning, when going outside, plan ahead so that you can get to a safe place quickly if a thunderstorm threatens. If the sky looks threatening or if you hear thunder, get inside a safe place immediately. Once inside, avoid contact with corded phones, electrical equipment, plumbing, and windows and doors. Finally, wait 30 minutes after the last lightning or thunder before going back outside. If everyone followed those simple rules, the number of lightning casualties in this country could be greatly reduced.

Lightning Risk Reduction: You are ***not safe*** anywhere outside. Run to a safe building or vehicle when you first hear thunder, see lightning or observe dark threatening clouds developing overhead. Stay inside until 30 minutes after you hear the last clap of thunder. Do ***not*** shelter under trees.

When a Safe Location is Not Nearby: These actions may *slightly* reduce your risk of being struck by lightning:

- Avoid open fields, the top of a hill or a ridge top.
- Stay away from tall, isolated trees or other tall objects. If you are in a forest, stay near a lower stand of trees.
- If you are camping in an open area, set up camp in a valley, ravine or other low area. Remember, a tent offers **NO** protection from lightning.
- Stay away from water, wet items (such as ropes) and metal objects (fences and poles). Water and metal are excellent conductors of electricity. The current from a lightning flash will easily travel for long distances

On the Water: The vast majority of lightning injuries and deaths on boats occur on **small boats with no cabin**. It is crucial to listen to weather information when you are boating. If thunderstorms are forecast, do not go out. If you are out and cannot get back to land and safety, drop anchor and get as low as possible. Large boats with cabins, especially those with **lightning protection systems** properly installed, or metal marine vessels are relatively safe. Remember to stay inside the cabin and away from any metal surfaces. Stay off the radio unless it is an emergency!

The information in this article was provided by the National Weather Service web site.

Have fun, but be safe.