

PUBLIC INFORMATION STATEMENT
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE RALEIGH NC
700 AM EDT WED JUN 25 2008

...LIGHTNING SAFETY OUTDOORS...

Many lightning deaths and injuries in the United States occur during the summer months and during the afternoon hours when both lightning and outdoor activities reach a peak. During the summer, people take advantage of the warm weather to enjoy a multitude of recreational activities. To be safe, those who are boating, swimming, fishing, bicycling, golfing, jogging, walking, hiking, camping, or working outdoors all need to take the appropriate actions in a timely manner when thunderstorms approach.

Being outdoors when thunderstorms are nearby involves risk, and certain locations are worse than others. Of the lightning casualty cases in the United States where the location of the incident was reported, about 48 percent occurred in open fields, ball parks, play grounds, etc.; another 23 percent occurred under trees; about 12 percent involved water-related activities; and about 6 percent involved golfing (either on the course or under a tree). People driving farm equipment or other heavy equipment accounted for about 7 percent.

To minimize the threat of being struck by lightning while outdoors, it is important to know when the lightning threat begins to increase significantly and when the threat is reduced to minimal levels. In general, the threat begins well before most people think it begins, and ends well after people think it ends. Unfortunately, it's this lack of understanding that accounts for many lightning casualties.

While no one can completely eliminate the risk of being struck by lightning, by using some basic rules, you can greatly reduce your risk of becoming a lightning casualty.

1. Plan ahead. If thunderstorms are forecast, consider canceling or postponing outdoor activities so that you avoid a potentially dangerous situation.
2. Monitor the weather conditions. Watch the sky for any signs of a developing or approaching storm, particularly if you need a long time to get to a safe place.
3. If the sky looks threatening or you hear thunder, immediately seek safety inside a substantial building. If a substantial building is not available, take shelter in a hard-topped metal vehicle. Remain there for at least 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning is seen or the last thunder is heard. Some lightning victims have made the mistake of returning outdoors before the threat is over.
4. If you are caught outside in a thunderstorm, you should try to minimize your risk of being struck by lightning. In these instances 1) avoid tall objects such as tall trees and poles, 2) avoid things that conduct electricity such as metal

bleachers or wire fences, 3) try to make yourself as small a target as possible, and 4) minimize your contact with the ground.

If you or your children are involved in organized, outdoor recreational activities, make sure in advance that the officials in charge have and follow a specific lightning safety plan. Don't be afraid to ask. Coaches, umpires, referees, or camp counselors must learn to protect the safety of the participants by stopping the activities early, so that there is sufficient amount of time for the participants and spectators to get to a safe place before the lightning threat becomes significant. In certain instances, substantial buildings may not be available for shelter, and cars and buses may provide the best protection, but be sure the windows are closed and that the occupants avoid contact with any metal in the vehicle.

Finally, don't forget the safety of your outside pets. Dog houses are not safe, and dogs which are chained to metal chains or wire runners are particularly vulnerable to a nearby lightning strike.

LIGHTNING SAFETY TIP FOR THE DAY: An AM radio can be used to monitor for any lightning activity. Tune the radio to an unused frequency and listen for the static caused by a lightning discharge. Your radio will be able to pick up this static from greater distances than you'd be able to hear thunder.

LIGHTNING QUESTION OF THE DAY: Are there any signs that a lightning strike is imminent?

ANSWER: Sometimes, but not always. In either case, there is little, if any, time to take action to protect yourself. Some of the signs include 1) your hair stands on end (as charges from the ground surge to the top of your head), 2) you hear a distinctive snapping or crackling sound (small discharges of static electricity may occur in an area where lightning is about to strike), 3) you experience a tingling sensation (electrical charges may be moving through your body), 4) there is a sudden increase in the static on portable electronic devices (electrical charges may be moving through the devices, and 5) an abnormal burning smell in the air (static discharges within the air give off an unusual odor). If you see any of these signs, lightning is about to strike you or somewhere very near you. Assume the lightning safety position. Squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet, place your hands over your ears and put your head between your knees. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize your contact with the ground. **DO NOT LIE FLAT ON THE GROUND.**

For additional information about lightning or lightning safety, visit NOAA's Lightning Safety Awareness web site at:

<http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov>