

Lightning Safety



Photo by Chuck Hagen
www.weblogs.wgntv.com

VIDEO CLIP

<http://oceantoday.noaa.gov/lightning/welcome.html>

With Lightning Safety Week a few weeks ago, the mission of the National Weather Service was to teach and reinforce lightning safety during the most prominent time of year, summer, with the peak season of lightning casualties occurring between June and August. Nevertheless, don't be fooled, lightning strikes year round.

How many safety rules do you remember from your childhood? Before I read these safety rules, I could only remember two that my grandma use to always say: 1) Don't stand under a tree or you will turn crisp as a potato chip, and 2) Don't sit on the toilet when there is lightning. As a young child, those rules alone conjured up some interesting visuals in my head; so much so that I remembered them forever! Dare I say that was the whole point? (Thanks grandma?)

Fact from the National Weather Service: *In the United States, there are an estimated 25 million lightning flashes each year. During the past 30 years, lightning killed an average of 58 people per year. This is higher than 57 deaths per year caused by tornadoes and average 48 deaths to hurricanes. Yet because lightning usually claims only one or two victims at a time and does not cause mass destruction of property, it is underrated as a risk. While documented lightning injuries in the United States average about 300 per year, undocumented injuries are likely much higher.*

How Lightning Enters a House or Building:

There are three main ways lightning enters homes and buildings:

1. A direct strike
2. Through wires or pipes that extend outside the structure
3. Through the ground

Regardless of the method of entrance, once in a structure, the lightning can travel through the electrical, phone, plumbing, and radio/television reception systems. Lightning can also travel through any metal wires or bars in concrete walls or flooring.

Unsafe buildings include carports, open garages, covered patios, picnic shelters, beach pavilions, golf shelters, tents of any kind, baseball dugouts, sheds and greenhouses.

Unsafe vehicles include convertibles, golf carts, riding mowers, open cab construction equipment and boats without cabins.

Can I help a Lightning Strike Victim?

Lightning victims do not carry an electrical charge, are safe to touch, and need urgent medical attention. Cardiac arrest is the immediate cause of death for those who die. Some deaths can be prevented if the victim receives the proper first aid immediately. Call 9-1-1 immediately and perform CPR if the person is unresponsive or not breathing. Use an Automatic External Defibrillator if one is available.



What the people at the National Weather Service would like you to know:

- **NO PLACE** outside is safe when thunderstorms are in the area!
- If you hear thunder, lightning is close enough to strike you.
- When you hear thunder, immediately move to safe shelter.
- Safe shelter is a substantial building or inside an enclosed, metal-topped vehicle.
- Stay in safe shelter at least 30 minutes after you hear the last clap of thunder.

Indoor Lightning Safety Tips:

- Stay off corded phones. You can use cell phones or cordless phones if they are not in a charger. Do not use computers or equipment directly connected to electricity, such as your stove. Unplug electronic equipment before the storm arrives.
- Avoid plumbing, including sinks, baths, and faucets. Do not wash your hands, take a shower, bath, or wash dishes. If lightning should directly strike a building with electricity and/or plumbing, the dangerous electrical current from the flash will typically travel through the wiring and and/or plumbing, and then into the ground. This is why you should stay away from showers, sinks, hot tubs, and electronic equipment such as TVs, radios, corded telephones and computers.
- Stay away from windows and doors. Small cracks in the frames can let lightning in.
- Do not lie on concrete floors, and do not lean against concrete walls.

Outdoor Lightning Safety Tips:

- Seek lower elevation areas.
- Never use a tree for shelter.
- Immediately get out and away from pools, lakes and other bodies of water.
- Stay away from all metallic objects (fences, power lines, poles, etc.)
- Do not raise umbrellas or golf clubs above you.

Remember Your Pets:

Doghouses are not safe shelters. Dogs that are chained to trees or chained to wire runners can easily fall victim to a lightning strike. It's best to bring your pets inside.



Photo by Amanda Pickett www.weblogs.wgntv.com



www.dogsdeservebetter.org

Protect Your Personal Property:

Lightning generates electrical surges that can damage electronic equipment some distance from the actual strike. Typical surge protectors will NOT protect equipment from a lightning strike. If you plan to be away from your home when thunderstorms are possible, unplug unneeded equipment. Do NOT unplug equipment **during** a thunderstorm as there is a risk you could be struck.



www.seattle.craigslist.org



The National Weather Service has links to more lightning safety, lightning science, the medical aspects of lightning, survivor stories, and tools for teachers too! We hope you will be able to check them out at your leisure.



- **Lightning Safety** Website: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/>
- **Lightning Science**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/science.htm>
- **Lightning Safety Outdoors**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/outdoors.htm>
- **Lightning Safety Indoors**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/indoors.htm>
- **Medical Aspects of Lightning**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/medical.htm>
- **Tools for Teachers**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/teachers.htm>
- **Survivor Stories**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/survivors.htm>
- **Success Stories**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/success.htm>
- **More Info**: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/more.htm>

Resources:

All information and statistics are from the National Weather Service
<http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov>

Photos:

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Created by Elizabeth Hall for Preparedness Fact of the Week
www.kingscountyoe.com
July 5, 2010