

How To Protect Yourself From A Thunderstorm Or Lightning

All thunderstorms are dangerous. Every thunderstorm produces lightning. In the United States, an average of 300 people is injured and 80 people are killed each year by lightning. Other associated dangers of thunderstorms include tornadoes, strong winds, hail, and flash flooding. Flash flooding is responsible for more fatalities-more than 140 annually-than any other thunderstorm associated hazard.

Thunderstorms may occur singly, in clusters, or in lines. Some of the most severe occur when a single thunderstorm affects one location for an extended time. Thunderstorms typically produce heavy rain for a brief period, anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour. Warm humid conditions are highly favorable for thunderstorm development. About 10 percent of thunderstorms are classified as severe-one that produces hail at least three-quarters of an inch in diameter, has winds of 58 miles per hour or higher, or produces a tornado.

Lightning's unpredictability increases the risk to individuals and property. It often strikes outside of heavy rain and may occur as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall. "Heat lightning" is actually lightning from a thunderstorm too far away for thunder to be heard. However, the storm may be moving in your direction! Most lightning deaths and injuries occur when people are caught outdoors in the summer months during the afternoon and evening. Lightning strike victims carry no electrical charge and should be attended to **immediately**.

To prepare for a thunderstorm you should remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage during a severe thunderstorm. Remember the 30/30 lightning safety rule: Go indoors, if after seeing lightning, you cannot count to 30 before hearing thunder. Stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.

The following are guidelines for what you should do if a thunderstorm is likely in your area:

- Postpone outdoors activities
- Get inside a home, building, or hard top automobile (not a convertible). Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.
- Remember, rubber soled shoes and rubber tires provide **NO** protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal.
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.
- Shutter windows and secure outside doors. If shutters are not available, close window blinds, shades, or curtains.
- Avoid showering or bathing. Plumbing and bathroom fixtures can conduct electricity.
- Use a corded telephone only for emergencies. Cordless and cellular telephones are safe to use.
- Unplug appliances and other electrical items such as computers and turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can cause serious damage.

Avoid the following:

- Natural lightning rods such as a tall, isolated tree in an open area.
- Hilltops, open fields, the beach, or a boat on the water.
- Isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas.
- Anything metal-tractors, farm equipment, motorcycles, golf carts, golf clubs, and bicycles

What to do during a Thunderstorm if you are:

In the woods-seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees.

In an open area-Go to a low place such as a ravine or valley. Be alert for flash floods.

On open water-Get to land and find shelter immediately.

Anywhere you feel your hair stand on end (which indicates that lightning is about to strike)-Squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands over your ears and your head between your knees. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize your contact to the ground. **DO NOT** lie flat on the ground.