

Lightning Safety

Summer is the peak time of the year for lightning strikes and lightning related fires. However, lightning does occur year round. It is important to be prepared for this dangerous weather phenomenon. In the United States, there are an estimated 25 million lightning flashes each year. During the past 30 years, lightning killed an average of 62 people each year. 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. The vast majority of lightning casualties can be easily, quickly, and cheaply avoided, if proper safety rules are followed. People need increased awareness of the lightning hazard and knowledge of lightning safety.

Lightning safety involves several easy steps that anyone can follow. While lightning safety can be inconvenient, consider how inconvenient the alternative of not following some simple safety rules could be! Remember: **No Place Outside Is Safe During Thunderstorms!!!**

Outdoor Safety

- Watch for developing thunderstorms: Thunderstorms are most likely to develop on spring or summer days but can occur year round.
- If you hear thunder, you are within striking distance of lightning. Seek shelter immediately inside a house, large enclosed building, or hard-topped vehicle. Avoid shelter under tall trees. There is no place outside that is safe during a thunderstorm. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder before leaving your shelter.
- Once inside a fully enclosed building, stay away from any path to the outside. Stay off the corded telephone. Stay away from electrical appliances, lighting, and electrical sockets. Stay away from plumbing. Don't watch lightning from windows or doorways. Inner rooms are generally better.
- Places to avoid:
 1. Higher elevations
 2. Wide-open areas, including sports fields and beaches
 3. Tall isolated objects like trees, poles, and light posts
 4. Water-related activities: boating, swimming (includes indoor pools), and fishing.
 5. Open vehicles like farm tractors, open construction vehicles, riding lawnmowers, and golf carts (even with roofs)
 6. Unprotected open buildings like picnic pavilions, rain shelters, and bus stops
 7. Metal fences and metal bleachers
- If you feel your hair stand on end, indicating 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 with the ground. Do not lie flat on the ground. This is a last resort when a building or hard-topped vehicle is not available.
- If a person is struck by lightning, call **9-1-1** and get medical care immediately. Lightning strike victims carry no electrical charge; attend to them immediately. Check their breathing, heartbeat, and pulse. CPR may be needed.

Indoor safety

- Unplug appliances and other electrical items, such as computers, and turn off air conditioners. If you are unable to unplug them, turn them off.
- Stay away from tubs, showers, and other plumbing. Install surge suppressors for key equipment. Make sure to install ground fault protectors on circuits near water or outdoors.
- Stay off corded phones, computers, and other electronic equipment that put you in direct contact with electricity or plumbing. Avoid washing your hands, bathing, doing laundry, or washing dishes.
- When inside, wait 30 minutes after the last strike, before going outside again.

In Summary

Lightning is dangerous. With common sense, you can greatly increase your safety and the safety of those you are with. At the first clap of thunder, go to an enclosed building or a fully enclosed vehicle and wait 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder before going outside again.

Remember:

WHEN THUNDER ROARS, GO INDOORS

Until next month, be safe!!!

Submitted by Captain Tony Orsini, Terryville Fire Department Health and Safety Officer

Sources: National Weather Service
National Fire Protection Association