



DATA COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONALS

SAFETY BULLETIN FOR MARCH, 2003. Lighting Safety



There are few things in nature as awesome—and fearsome—as lightning. Usually accompanied by the roar of thunder, it illuminates the sky and devastates almost any target it strikes.

To avoid being one of those targets, review the safety tips below.

The best way to avoid lightning is not to put yourself, family or friends in danger in the first place. No one should be caught "off guard" by thunderstorms. Weather information is all around you. You can:

- Pay attention to TV, radio, and online weather forecasts
- Subscribe to lightning notification services
- Scan the skies 360 degrees around you and overhead

Thunderstorms rarely sneak up on anyone who's truly concerned. If weather warnings or your own observations confirm that thunderstorms will be near where your activity is planned, go to your back-up plans.

WATCH FOR THUNDERSTORMS AND USE THE 30/30 RULE.

During thunderstorms, no place outside is safe. But lightning safety experts agree that you can minimize your risk if thunderstorms develop or approach by following these steps:

Designate someone from your group to be the storm watcher. Use the 30/30 rule:

- When you see lightning, count the seconds until you hear thunder.
- If this time is 30 seconds or less, quickly go inside a substantial building. If such a building is not available, a metal-topped vehicle is the next best choice.

Wait at least 30 minutes after seeing the last lightning or hearing the last thunder before going back outside.

THE MOST DANGER

The two mostly deadly places you can be are in open spaces or under trees. Avoid

open spaces and trees during thunderstorms.

Also avoid things that conduct electricity such as water, utility lines, and metal fences. Get to a safe place as quickly as you can. A substantial, enclosed building is the safest place. A metal-topped vehicle with the windows up is the next best alternative if you can't get to a building. But don't touch any metal inside the vehicle.

- Boaters: Get off the water and go to a safe place.
- Swimmers: Get out of the water and go to a safe place.
- Players on open playing fields: Get off the field and go to safe place.
- Golfers: Leave the golf course and go to a safe place, such as a clubhouse.
- Hikers: Turn around and go back to a building or your metal-topped vehicle.

Your last resort is stay low and stay away from trees and tall structures.

If you're still outdoors and lightning has struck close to you, crouch down into a ball on the balls of your feet. Your goal is to be the smallest target possible with the least contact with the ground. Do not seek shelter under tall or isolated trees or unsubstantial shelters. It's better to be wet from the rain than dead or disabled from lightning.

LIGHTNING SAFETY @ HOME

During thunderstorms, televisions, computers, and other home electronics can be zapped by direct or indirect lightning strikes and power surges. A few people die every year from lightning while talking on the phone. Here are guidelines to keep this from happening to you.

Leave your electronics unplugged (including modem phone lines) during thunderstorm season except to use them.

Unplug your home electronics before thunderstorms arrive. Typically, summer thunderstorms form mid-day to evening, while you're at work. Unplug your TV, stereo, home entertainment centers, and computers before you go to work in the morning, anytime you're leaving your home for a few hours, and when you go to bed.

Stop playing video games connected to your TV

Electronic equipment with handsets, joysticks, and headsets connected by wiring to your TV, computer, or stereo are dangerous during thunderstorms. Wiring creates a path for lightning to reach you

from outside your home.

Be sure to disconnect all wiring to TVs and computers, including phone lines and cable connections.

Stay away from windows

Metal window frames conduct electricity. Windowpanes can break from the shock of thunder, wind-blown objects, or large hail.

Never touch wiring during a thunderstorm—it's too late to unplug your electronics if thunderstorms are close.

If you're in the lightning danger zone, you should not touch any wiring, even to unplug your home electronics! Lightning can travel from outside your home to inside your home—and to you—through materials that conduct electricity, including electrical wiring, phone lines, water, and plumbing in an instant. These safety guidelines will help minimize your risk.

When you first hear thunder, it's time to take precautions indoors

Inside, you may not see lightning or hear thunder as you would outdoors. If you're inside and you hear thunder or see lightning, it's time to take precautions. Continue your indoor safety precautions for 30 minutes after you see the last lightning or hear the last thunder.

Avoid using phones and only use cell phones or cordless phones.

Corded phones are dangerous during thunderstorms. Cell phone and cordless phones are a safer choice, but stand away from the cell or cordless phone's power base. Be sure to keep your cordless and cell phones charged; they may not work if your power goes out.

Wait to use any plumbing—sinks, showers, tubs, and toilets

Plumbing too, can conduct electricity from lightning outside your home to you.

Be careful and follow these guidelines, but don't worry too much. According to one source the chances of being hit by lightning are one in 600,000.

Excerpted from:

LIGHTNINGSTORM.COM

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