

## **Preparing for a Thunderstorm**

All thunderstorms are dangerous. Every thunderstorm produces lightning. While lightning fatalities have decreased over the past 30 years, lightning continues to be one of the top three storm-related killers in the United States. On average in the U.S., lightning kills 51 people and injures hundreds more. Although most lightning victims survive, people struck by lightning often report a variety of long-term, debilitating symptoms.

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. Dry thunderstorms that do not produce rain that reaches the ground are most prevalent in the western United States. Falling raindrops evaporate, but lightning can still reach the ground and can start wildfires.

To prepare for a thunderstorm, you should do the following:

- To begin preparing, you should prepare an emergency kit and make a family communications plan.
- Remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage during a severe thunderstorm.
- Postpone outdoor activities.
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.
- 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.
- Shutter windows and secure outside doors. If shutters are not available, close window blinds, shades or curtains.
- Unplug any electronic equipment well before the storm arrives.

## **Lightning Risk Reduction When Outdoors**

- If you are in a forest seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees.
- If you are in an open area go to a low place such as a ravine or valley. Be alert for flash floods.
- If you are on open water get to land and find shelter immediately.

## **Facts about Thunderstorms**

- They 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 (known as training).
- Thunderstorms typically produce heavy rain for a brief period, anywhere from 30 minutes to an 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 an inch or larger in diameter, has winds of 58 miles per hour or higher or produces a tornado.

### **Facts about Lightning**

- Lightning’s unpredictability increases the risk to individuals and property.
- Lightning 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 from 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.
- Your chances of being struck by lightning are estimated to be 1 in 600,000 but could be reduced even further by following safety precautions.
- Lightning strike victims carry no electrical charge and should be attended to immediately.

### **Know the Terms**

Familiarize yourself with these terms to help identify a thunderstorm hazard:

- Severe Thunderstorm Watch - Tells you when and where severe thunderstorms are likely to occur. Watch the sky and stay tuned to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio or television for information.
- Severe Thunderstorm Warning - Issued when severe weather has been reported by spotters or indicated by radar. Warnings indicate imminent danger to life and property to those in the path of the storm.