

Lightning

EVERY THUNDERSTORM contains lightning. The electrical charge of a lightning strike, which may reach 300 million volts, searches for the path of least resistance to complete the circuit from the cloud. It might strike you, an isolated tree, or an object in the open. Keep in mind that you do not have to be standing directly beneath a cloud to be struck. Lightning can strike under clear skies as long as the parent thunderstorm cloud is nearby.

Lightning has been called "the underrated killer" since it usually does not get as much headline attention compared to other dangerous weather phenomena. In a typical year, lightning will strike over 20 million times and will claim more victims than tornadoes or hurricanes. On average, about 100 deaths and 500 injuries occur nationally each year as a result of lightning strikes. Between 1995 and 2008 in Alabama, 127 injuries and 22 deaths have been attributed to lightning.

Anyone outdoors is particularly vulnerable to lightning. Every person, group, or school involved in outdoor activities should have a plan that can be activated quickly, when lightning is possible. Take time to learn lightning safety rules. A quick dash out in the open with a nearby thunderstorm may unnecessarily expose you to the possibility of being struck. Is it worth the risk?



Photo courtesy of Jeff Loney in Huntsville, AL

Lightning Safety

Indoor Safety:

- Stay away from windows and doors, and off porches.
- Do not use phones or cell phones, except for emergencies.
- Avoid contact with TVs, power tools, appliances, computers, and any other electrical equipment.
- Avoid contact with plumbing, including washing dishes and laundry.
- Do not lie on concrete floors or lean against concrete walls.

Outdoor Safety:

- Take shelter in a strong, sturdy, enclosed building. Sheds, dugouts, picnic areas, tents, and gazebos are not safe.
- Get in an enclosed motor vehicle, if available. Keep windows up and doors closed.
- Avoid metallic objects such as fences, pipes, poles, power lines, and bikes.
- Stay away from bodies of water.
- Avoid open spaces, isolated objects, and high ground.

For more lightning safety information visit www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov .