

The National Weather Service has declared the week of June 21st through June 27th as LIGHTNING SAFETY AWARENESS WEEK. This is the third in a series of five public information statements to be issued by the National Weather Service Office in Hastings containing information on lightning and lightning safety.

The topic for today is Outdoor Safety.

Many lightning deaths and injuries in the United States occur during the summer months and during the afternoon hours when both lightning and outdoor activities reach a peak. During the summer, people take advantage of the warm weather to enjoy a multitude of recreational activities. To be safe, those who are outdoors need to take the appropriate actions in a timely manner when thunderstorms approach.

To minimize the threat of being struck by lightning while outdoors, it is important to know when the lightning threat begins to increase significantly and when the threat is reduced to minimal levels. In general, the threat begins well before most people think it begins, and ends after people think it ends. Unfortunately, it's this lack of understanding that accounts for many lightning casualties.

While no one can completely eliminate the risk of being struck by lightning, by using some basic rules, you can greatly reduce your risk of becoming a lightning casualty.

Plan ahead. If thunderstorms are forecast, consider cancelling or postponing outdoor activities so that you avoid a potentially dangerous situation.

Monitor the weather conditions. Watch the sky for any signs of a developing or approaching storm, particularly if you need a long time to get to a safe place.

If the sky looks threatening or you hear thunder, immediately seek safety inside a substantial building. If a substantial building is not available, take shelter in a hard-topped metal vehicle, but keep all windows rolled up and avoid contact with any metal. Remain there for at least 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning is seen or the last thunder is heard.

If you are caught outside in a thunderstorm, try to minimize your risk of being struck by lightning. Avoid tall

objects such as trees and poles, and things that conduct electricity such as metal bleachers or wire fences.

If you or your children are involved in organized, outdoor recreational activities, make sure in advance that the officials in charge have and follow a specific lightning safety plan. Don't be afraid to ask. Coaches, umpires, referees, or camp counselors must learn to protect the safety of the participants by stopping the activities early, to give a sufficient amount of time for the participants and spectators to get to a safe place before lightning strikes.

Finally, don't forget the safety of your outside pets. Dog houses are not safe, and dogs which are chained with metal chains or wire runners are particularly vulnerable to a nearby lightning strike.

For additional information about lightning and lightning safety, visit the following website:

<http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/>