

# Safety Tips



## THUNDERSTORMS:

### *Protecting Yourself, Your Co-workers, and Your Family*

Residents in many areas of the United States are aware of the hazards presented by thunderstorms. To borrow an expression from Paul Harvey "...but do you know - the rest of the story." How do you protect yourself, your co-workers, and your family during thunderstorms?

The first step is to know what is happening in your area. If you don't have a weather alert radio, purchase one. The National Weather Service broadcasts weather information on seven NOAA frequencies throughout the country. The frequencies are 162.400, 162.425, 162.450, 162.475, 162.500, 162.525, and 162.550. Transmitters are set up throughout each state. The weather service reports that a nation wide survey indicates only a few spots cannot pick up an NOAA broadcast. During periods of good weather, broadcast tapes are revised every six hours. However, during severe weather conditions, broadcast tapes are updated as weather conditions change.

When severe weather is imminent, do you know what to do? Let's review some basics that can help us survive severe weather events.

If a **tornado** strike is imminent, take the following action:

#### **Open Country:**

Seek inside shelter if it is close by and time permits. If there is not time to escape, lie flat in the nearest depression, such as a ditch or ravine. A parked vehicle is unsafe as a shelter during a tornado or severe wind-storm and should be avoided.

#### **Office Buildings:**

The basement or an interior hallway on a lower floor of an office is safest. Upper stories are unsafe. If there is not time to descend, a closet or small room with stout walls (bathroom), or an inside hallway will give some protection against flying debris. Otherwise, get under heavy furniture. Select and mark shelter areas in office buildings.

#### **Factories, Auditoriums and Other Large Buildings with Wide, Free-Span Roofs:**

Buildings of this type are particularly vulnerable to tornado wind damage due to the large roof expanse upon which the wind force may act and also the relatively large area between roof supporting walls. Basements of these buildings offer reasonably good protection, as do smaller interior rooms at ground level or nearby sturdy buildings.

#### **Homes without Basements:**

Take cover in the smallest room with stout walls, or under heavy furniture, or a tipped-over upholstered couch or chair in the center part of the house. Stay away from windows, doors and outside walls. Protect your head.

#### **Thunderstorms:**

When **lightning** (thunderstorms) threatens, get inside a home or large building. Keep away from windows, exterior doors, water faucets, main distribution frame, switch equipment, electrical appliances, etc. If outdoors, with no time to reach a building or vehicle, follow these rules:

Get out and away from open water.

Get away from bicycles, motorcycles, and wheeled and track equipment.

Stay away from aerial lines, down guys, pedestals, towers, wire fences, clotheslines, metal pipes, rails or other metallic paths which could carry lightning to you.

Stay away from small, isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas.

Avoid being the highest object on the surrounding landscape. In open areas, go to a low place such as a ravine or valley. In a forest, seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees. Don't get under natural lightning rod such as a tall tree.

If you are isolated in a field and your hair stand on end (indicating lightning is about to strike), drop to your knees and bend forward putting your hand on your knees. **DO NOT LIE FLAT ON THE GROUND.**

Many people erroneously believe that wearing rubber sole shoes or rubber boots will protect them from lightning. If lightning can jump through hundreds of feet of air, an inch of rubber won't stop it.

When sitting in or driving a vehicle, you are protected by the shell of the vehicle. Do not touch the door handle or any metal object in the vehicle.

Thunder, the sound of lightning, travels at 1/5 mile per second. Count the time that elapses between your first sight of the lightning flash and the sound of the thunder to determine how close the lightning is.

#### **Flash Flood:**

If a **flash flood** watch is in effect follow these safety rules: Keep alert for signs of heavy rain, both where you are and upstream.

Be especially cautious at night. It's harder to recognize the danger in the dark.

Know where high ground is and how to get there quickly.

Don't try to out race a flood on foot. If you see or hear it coming, move to higher ground as fast as you can.

Evacuate when flooding is imminent.

Above all, **don't try to drive through or walk across flooded areas.**

After the storm (or other emergency) our priority is to locate family members who were in different locations when the storm struck. Following the March 1, 1997 tornado in Saline and Pulaski counties (Central Arkansas), many residents of the devastated area frantically tried to locate family members. Several neighborhoods hit by the tornado were sealed off because of downed power lines, search and rescue operations, and the probability of looting.

One family with no emergency plan spent approximately 18 hours before locating all family members and determining that everyone was safe. If the family had designated a relative or friend in another city or state as the contact following a disaster, each of them could have made one call that would have accounted for all family members within a short time. Without a contact plan, families frantically search and add to the already overloaded emergency management communications system.

If you don't have a family emergency action plan, take time to develop one. Make certain everyone knows the safest place to seek shelter in the event of a tornado, the rendezvous point to use if lightning strikes the house, and starts a fire, and how to evacuate if flooding is imminent. Review and update the plan with all family members each year and immediately after moving.

Pre-planning saves lives. Reacting at the height of the storm (without a plan) may place you needlessly in harm's way.

- J C Smith, CUSA  
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