

Lightning – The Underrated Killer

Source: *National Weather Service Lightning Safety Program*



Photo courtesy of NOAA
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Pre-reading

Questions: What do you know about lightning? What more would you like to know about it?

Definitions: Underrated – rated too low

Phenomena – unusual or marvelous occurrences

Confirm – to show something to be true

Vulnerable – easily able to be hurt or injured

Reading

Summer is the peak season for one of the nation's deadliest weather phenomena – lightning. In the United States, an average of 66 people is killed each year by lightning. In 2004, there were 32 deaths attributed to lightning, down from 44 thanks in part to increased education and safety. In 2005, there were 43 confirmed deaths and 172 confirmed injuries. The injury number is likely far lower than it actually is because many people do not seek help or doctors do not report it as a lightning injury.

Lightning is a serious danger. In the United States, there are an estimated 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes each year. Lightning can be fascinating to watch, but it is also extremely dangerous. Few people really understand the dangers of lightning.

Although some victims are struck directly by the main lightning strike, many victims are struck as the current moves in and along the ground. While almost all people take some protective actions during the most dangerous part of thunderstorms, many leave themselves vulnerable to being struck by lightning as thunderstorms approach, depart, or are nearby.

Lightning can strike as far as 10 miles away from the rain area in a thunderstorm. That's about the distance you can hear thunder. When a storm is 10 miles away, it may even be difficult to tell a storm is coming. If you can hear thunder, you are within striking distance. Seek safe shelter immediately! The first strike of lightning is just as deadly as the last.

Use the 30-30 rule where visibility is good and there is nothing obstructing your view of the thunderstorm. When you see lightning, count the time until you hear thunder. If that time is 30 seconds or less, the thunderstorm is within 6 miles of you and is dangerous. **Seek shelter immediately.**

The threat of lightning continues for a much longer period than most people think. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder before leaving shelter. Don't be fooled by sunshine or blue sky!

Most lightning deaths and injuries in the United States occur during the summer months when the combinations of lightning and outdoor summertime activities reach a peak. People who are outdoors need to take action in a timely manner when thunderstorms approach.

Inside homes, people must also be aware of ways to reduce their risk of lightning strikes. They should stay away from windows and doors and avoid contact with anything that **conducts** electricity.

Lightning is a dangerous threat to people in the United States, particularly those outside in the summer. By using common sense, the number of lightning deaths can be greatly reduced.

Understanding

1. Why is summer the peak season for lightning deaths and injuries? _____

2. What does the word **conduct** mean in this reading? _____

3. What is the 30-30 rule? And, when can it be used? _____

4. Is the number of victims of lightning strikes accurate? Why? _____

5. How can people be struck by lightning? (List two ways.) _____

6. When is it safe to leave shelter after a thunderstorm? _____

7. What does the sentence, “**Seek shelter immediately**” mean? _____

8. Why is lightning so dangerous? _____

Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about someone you know who has been struck by lightning.

Option C: What new things did you learn about lightning? How will what you’ve learned affect your behavior when storms are present?
