



Lightning Risk Reduction Outdoors

There is little you can do to substantially reduce your risk if you are outside in a thunderstorm. The only completely safe action is to get inside a safe building or vehicle.

Lightning Risk Reduction When a Safe Location is Nearby

You are ***not safe*** anywhere outside. Run to a safe building or vehicle when you first hear thunder, see lightning or observe dark threatening clouds developing overhead. Stay inside until 30 minutes after you hear the last clap of thunder. Do ***not*** shelter under trees.

Plan Ahead!

Your best source of up-to-date weather information is a NOAA Weather Radio (NWR). Portable weather radios are handy for outdoor activities. If you don't have NWR, stay up to date via internet, smart phone, radio or TV. If you're in a group, make sure the group has a lightning safety plan and are ready to use it. If you're in a large group, you'll need extra time to get everyone to a safe place. The National Weather Service (NWS) recommends having proven professional lightning detection equipment that will alert your group when lightning is nearing the event site.



Coach of Outdoor Sports Team

Your little league team has an evening game at the local recreational park. The weather forecast calls for partly cloudy skies, with a chance of thunderstorms by early evening. When you arrive at the park, you notice the only safe buildings are the restrooms. Shortly after sunset, the sky gets cloudy and you see bright flashes in the sky. What should you do? Get everyone into vehicles or the restrooms. Do NOT stay in the dugouts; they are ***not*** safe during lightning activity. Once in a safe place, wait 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder before resuming play.

At the Beach/Lake

Your family plans to go to the beach today. The weather forecast calls for a nice morning followed by a 30 percent chance of afternoon thunderstorms. When you get to the beach, you see that the only nearby structures are open-sided picnic shelters. The parking lot is a 5 minute walk from the beach. By early afternoon skies are darkening and hear distant thunder. What should you do? Go to your car! Do NOT seek shelter under the beach picnic shelters. Wait 30 minutes until after the last rumble of thunder before going back to the beach.

Camping and Other Wilderness Activities

You're cooking dinner on the camp stove when you hear distant rumbles of thunder. Your tent and a large open sided picnic shelter are nearby. Your vehicle is about quarter of a mile away parked at the trail head. What should you do? Go to your vehicle! The tent and picnic shelter are NOT a safe places. Wait 30 minutes until after the last rumble of thunder before going back to the campsite. For those who cannot get to a vehicle, here are tips from the National Outdoor Leadership School on what to do in the back country, in a canoe, etc., as a last resort.



When a Safe Location is *not* Nearby

Remember, there is NO safe place outside in a thunderstorm. If you absolutely can't get to safety, this section *may* help you slightly lessen the threat of being struck by lightning while outside.

Know the weather patterns of the area you plan to visit. For example, in mountainous areas, thunderstorms typically develop in the early afternoon, so plan to hike early in the day and be down the mountain by noon. Listen to the weather forecast for the outdoor area you plan to visit. The forecast may be very different from the one near your home. If there is a high chance of thunderstorms, stay inside.

These actions may *slightly* reduce your risk of being struck by lightning:

- Avoid open fields, the top of a hill or a ridge top.
- Stay away from tall, isolated trees or other tall objects. If you are in a forest, stay near a lower stand of trees.
- If you are camping in an open area, set up camp in a valley, ravine or other low area. Remember, a tent offers NO protection from lightning.
- Stay away from water, wet items (such as ropes) and metal objects (such as fences and poles). Water and metal are excellent conductors of electricity. The current from a lightning flash will easily travel for long distance along any conductive material or surface.
- **Motorcyclist/Bicyclist:** Protect yourself when on a bicycle, motorcycle or dirt bike. Carry a portable NOAA Weather Radio or listen to commercial radio. If you see threatening skies in the distance and you are near a safe building, pull over and wait 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder before resuming your ride.
- **On the Water:** The vast majority of lightning injuries and deaths on boats occur on small boats with NO cabin. It is crucial to listen to weather information when you are boating. If thunderstorms are forecast, do not go out. If you are out and cannot get back to land and safety, drop anchor and get as low as possible. Large boats with cabins, especially those with lightning protection systems properly installed, or metal marine vessels are relatively safe. Remember to stay inside the cabin and away from any metal surfaces. Stay off the radio unless it is an emergency!

For more information, go to <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/outdoors.htm>

Source: National Weather Service

This Alliant Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.

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