

June 2010

Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Seeking Shelter From The Storm

June 20-26, 2010 is Lightning Safety Week. The National Weather Service (NWS) wants everyone to remember: When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors! There have already been two lightning fatalities in the United States this year and the summer storm season is not even upon us. In 2009 there were 34 fatalities, all of which occurred either outdoors or in an unsafe shelter. There is no safe place outdoors during a lightning storm. Seeking safe shelter can be a matter of life and death.

What are safe shelters ?

The NWS defines a safe building as one that is fully enclosed with a roof, walls and floor, and has plumbing or wiring. Examples of safe buildings include a home, school, church, hotel, office building or shopping center.

Vehicles can also be used as shelter, but only certain types of vehicles are safe. A safe vehicle is any fully enclosed metal topped vehicle such as a hard topped car, minivan, bus, truck or full cab heavy equipment.



What shelters are considered unsafe ?

Unsafe buildings include car ports, open garages, covered patios, picnic shelters, beach pavilions, golf shelters, tents of any kind, baseball dugouts, sheds and greenhouses.

Unsafe vehicles include convertibles, golf carts, riding mowers, open cab farm or construction equipment and boats without cabins.

What makes a shelter safe ?

The key element for a structure is that it is fully enclosed and has wiring and/or plumbing. This reduces the risk of contact with the lightning. When lightning directly strikes this type of building, the electrical current from the flash will usually travel through the wiring and/or plumbing and then into the ground. Structures that are not enclosed or lack these features may not provide protection.

The same principle applies to vehicles. The metal roof and sides provide the protection from the lightning. The rubber tires do not. Rubber tires can act more conductive than insulating. A person is safe in an enclosed vehicle because the lightning travels around the surface of the vehicle and then goes to ground.

How to maximize safety inside a shelter

- ⚡ Stay OFF corded phones. Use only cellular or cordless phones
- ⚡ Don't touch electrical equipment or cords. Unplug electronic equipment before the storm arrives
- ⚡ Avoid plumbing. Do not wash your hands, take a bath, shower or wash dishes
- ⚡ Stay away from windows and doors, and stay off porches. Do not lie on concrete floors and do not lean against concrete walls

Pet safety is also important. Be sensitive to pet reactions to thunderstorms. Dog houses in the yard are not safe shelters. Animals chained to trees, fences or wire runners may become victims of a lightning strike. Bring your pets indoors if possible.



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