



**Are You  
Prepared?**

# Severe Thunderstorms

Courtesy of Huckaby & Associates

Every thunderstorm produces lightning, which is extremely dangerous. Though lightning fatalities have decreased over the past 30 years, lightning continues to be one of the top three storm-related killers in the United States. In 2014, there were 26 fatalities from lightning. Although most lightning victims survive, people struck by lightning often report a variety of long-term, debilitating symptoms.

Other associated dangers of thunderstorms include tornadoes, strong winds, hail and flash flooding. Flash flooding is responsible for more fatalities—more than 140 every year—than any other thunderstorm-associated hazard. Dry thunderstorms that do not produce rain that reaches the ground are most prevalent in the western United States. Falling raindrops evaporate, but lightning can still reach the ground and can start wildfires.

## **Before a Thunderstorm and Lightning**

To prepare for a thunderstorm, you should do the following:

- Build an emergency kit and make a family communications plan.
- Remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage during a severe thunderstorm.
- Postpone outdoor activities.
- Remember the 30/30 Lightning Safety Rule: Go indoors if, after seeing lightning, you cannot count to 30 before hearing thunder. Stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.



- Get inside a home, building or hard top automobile (not a convertible). Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.
- Remember, rubber-soled shoes and rubber tires provide NO protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal.
- Shutter windows and secure outside doors. If shutters are not available, close window blinds, shades or curtains.
- Unplug any electronic equipment before the storm arrives.

#### *Facts about Thunderstorms*

- They may occur singly, in clusters or in lines.
- A single thunderstorm affecting one location for an extended time can be more severe than other storms.
- Thunderstorms typically produce heavy rain for a brief period, anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour.
- Warm, humid conditions are highly favorable for thunderstorm development.
- About 10 percent of thunderstorms are classified as severe; these storms generally produce hail at least an inch or larger in diameter and have winds of 58 miles per hour or higher. They can also produce tornadoes.

#### *Facts about Lightning*

- Lightning's unpredictability increases the risk to individuals and property.
- Lightning often strikes outside of heavy rain and may occur as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall.
- "Heat lightning" is actually lightning from a thunderstorm too far away for thunder to be heard. However, the storm may be moving in your direction.
- Most lightning deaths and injuries occur when people are caught outdoors in the summer months during the afternoon and evening.
- Your chances of being struck by lightning are estimated to be 1 in 600,000, but could be reduced even further by following safety precautions.
- Lightning strike victims carry no electrical charge and should be attended to immediately.

#### **During Thunderstorms and Lightning**

If thunderstorms and lightning are occurring in your area, you should do the following:

- Use a battery-operated National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio for updates from local officials.

#### **Know the Terms**

Familiarize yourself with these terms that help identify a thunderstorm hazard:

- **Severe thunderstorm watch** - Tells you when and where severe thunderstorms are likely to occur. Watch the sky and stay tuned to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio or television for information.
- **Severe thunderstorm warning** - Issued when severe weather has been reported by spotters or indicated by radar. Warnings indicate imminent danger to life and property to those in the path of the storm.

- Avoid contact with corded phones and devices, including those plugged into electrical outlets for recharging. Cordless and wireless phones not connected to wall outlets are safe to use.
- Avoid contact with electrical equipment or cords. Unplug appliances and other electrical items, such as computers, and turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can cause serious damage.
- Avoid contact with plumbing. Do not wash your hands, do not take a shower, do not wash dishes and do not do laundry. Plumbing and bathroom fixtures can conduct electricity.
- Stay away from windows and doors, and stay off porches.
- Do not lie on concrete floors and do not lean against concrete walls.
- Avoid natural lightning rods such as tall, isolated trees in open areas.
- Avoid hilltops, open fields, the beach and boats on the water.
- Take shelter in a sturdy building. Avoid isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas.
- Avoid contact with anything metal, such as tractors, farm equipment, motorcycles, golf carts, golf clubs and bicycles.
- If you are driving, try to safely exit the roadway and park. Stay in the vehicle and turn on the emergency flashers until the heavy rain ends. Avoid touching metal or other surfaces that conduct electricity in and outside the vehicle.

*Lightning Safety When Outdoors*

If you are:	Then:
In a forest	Seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees.
In an open area	Go to a low place such as a ravine or valley. Be alert for flash floods.
On open water	Get to land and find shelter immediately.
Anywhere you feel your hair stand on end (which indicates that lightning is about to strike)	Squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands over your ears and your head between your knees. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize your contact with the ground. DO NOT lie flat on the ground.

**After a Thunderstorm or Lightning Strike**

If lightning strikes you or someone you know, call 911 for medical assistance as soon as possible. The following are things you should check when you attempt to give aid to a victim of lightning:

- **Breathing** - if breathing has stopped, begin mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
- **Heartbeat** - if the heart has stopped, administer CPR.
- **Pulse** - if the victim has a pulse and is breathing, look for other possible injuries. Check for burns where the lightning entered and left the body. Be alert for nervous system damage, broken bones and loss of hearing and eyesight.

After the storm passes, remember the following:

- Never drive through a flooded roadway. Water can damage your vehicle and poses a drowning hazard.
- Continue to listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or to local radio and television stations for updated information or instructions, as access to roads or some parts of the community may be blocked.
- Help people who may require special assistance, such as infants, children and the elderly or those with access or functional needs.
- Stay away from downed power lines and report them immediately.
- Watch your animals closely. Keep them under your direct control.

In addition to insuring your home, Huckaby & Associates is committed to helping you and your loved ones stay safe when disaster strikes. If you would like more information on developing a family emergency plan or building a disaster supply kit, please contact us at (803) 772-3773 or [www.huckabyandassociates.com](http://www.huckabyandassociates.com) today.