



## Know the dangers when lightning strikes

By Tom Wawzenek | Tuesday, July 22, 2014

*(**Editor's Note:** This article is based on information from the [National Weather Service](#) and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).)*

Summer is the peak season for one of the nation's deadliest weather phenomena — lightning.

Every year, lightning causes forest, grass, and house fires across the US. According to the [National Fire Protection Association](#), lightning causes an average of about 24,600 fires each year and costs about \$407 million in damages.



While most fires occur in outdoor areas, lightning causes about 4,400 house fires each year, costing approximately \$283 million in damages. In addition, wildfires caused by lightning burn an average of 5.5 million acres annually. About 16 fire deaths are attributed to lightning-caused fires each year — most victims are occupants of homes that have been ignited by lightning.

Here are safety tips from the [Centers of Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [National Weather Service](#) on what you should do if you are outdoors or indoors during a thunderstorm.

### Outdoor safety tips

- Check the weather forecast before participating in an outdoor activity. If the forecast calls for thunderstorms, postpone your activity or make sure adequate safe shelter is readily available.
- Remember the phrase, "when thunder roars, go indoors." Find a safe, enclosed shelter when you hear thunder. Safe shelters include homes, offices, shopping centers, and hard-top vehicles with the windows rolled up.
- If you are caught in an open area, crouch down in a ball-like position (feet and knees together) with your head tucked and hands over your ears so that you are down low with minimal contact with the ground. Never lie down. Lightning causes electric currents along the top of the ground that can be deadly more than 100 feet away. Crouching down is the best combination of being low and touching the ground as little as possible.

- If you are in a group during a thunderstorm, separate from each other. This will reduce the number of injuries if lightning strikes the ground.
- During a thunderstorm, avoid open vehicles such as convertibles, motorcycles, and golf carts. Also avoid open structures such as porches, gazebos and open-aired stadiums.
- Stay away from open spaces such as golf courses, parks, playgrounds, ponds, lakes, swimming pools, and beaches.
- Stay away from objects that conduct electricity, such as wire fences.
- Come down from elevated areas.
- Never seek shelter under a tree.

### **Indoor safety tips**

Even though your home is a safe shelter during a lightning storm, you may still be at risk. About one-third of lightning-strike injuries occur indoors. Here are some tips to keep you safe and reduce your risk of being struck by lightning while indoors.

- Do not bathe, shower, wash dishes, or have any other contact with water during a thunderstorm because lightning can travel through a building's plumbing system.
- Do not use computers, game systems, washers, dryers, stoves, or anything connected to an electrical outlet. Lightning can travel through electrical systems, radio and television reception systems, and any metal wires or bars in concrete walls or flooring. Typical surge protectors will not protect equipment from a lightning strike. Equip homes with whole-house surge protectors to protect appliances.
- Corded phones are not safe to use during a thunderstorm. However, it is safe to use cordless or cellular phones during a storm.
- Do not lie on concrete floors or lean on concrete walls in your home. Lightning can travel through any metal wires or bars in concrete walls or flooring.

*Planet BP welcomes your [feedback](#).*