

# Thunderstorm/Lightning Facts & Safety Tips

*Lightning Safety Week: June 17-23, 2018*



## Thunderstorm/Lightning Facts

Summertime is the peak season for one of the nation's deadliest weather phenomena – lightning. According to the National Weather Service, in a 10-year average, lightning kills an average of 32 people in the United States every year.

Unlike other weather hazards that often involve sophisticated watches and warnings from the National Weather Service, lightning can occur anywhere there is a thunderstorm – which is why the NWS conducts annual campaigns to educate the public about lightning risks.

In 2017, there were 16 lightning fatalities in a total of six states, which is down substantially from the previous year. An 82-year-old man from Brewster, Ohio was fatally struck by lightning on August 2, as he was working in a field.

Of the 38 lightning-strike fatalities:

- All of the incidents occurred outside.
- 15 were male; one female. The youngest: a newborn infant boy; pregnant woman was struck by lightning.

## Watch for Developing Thunderstorms

Thunderstorms are most likely to develop on spring or summer days but can occur year round. As the sun heats the air, pockets of warmer air start to rise and cumulus clouds form. Continued heating can cause these clouds to grow vertically into towering cumulus clouds, often the first sign of a developing thunderstorm.

## Know Lightning Safety

There is no safe place outside when thunderstorms are in the area. If you hear thunder, you are likely within striking distance of the storm. Just remember: ***When thunder roars, go indoors!***

The best way to protect yourself and others from lightning or any severe storm is to avoid the threat. Have a lightning safety plan. Cancel or postpone outdoor activities early, if thunderstorms are expected. Monitor weather conditions and get to a safe place before the weather becomes threatening. Substantial buildings and hard-topped vehicles are safe options. Rain shelters, small sheds and open vehicles are not safe.



### **What You Need to Know**

- There is *No Safe Place* outside when thunderstorms are in the area.
- If you hear thunder, lightning is close enough to strike you.
- When you hear thunders, *immediately* move to safe shelter such as a substantial building with electricity or plumbing enclosed, or a metal-topped vehicle with the windows up.
- Stay in safe shelter for at least 30 minutes after hearing the last sound of thunder.

### **Indoor Lightning Safety**

- Stay off corded phones, computers and other electrical equipment that put you in direct contact with electricity.
- Avoid plumbing, including sinks, baths and faucets.
- Stay away from windows and doors, and stay off porches.
- Do not lie on concrete floors, and do not lean against concrete walls.

### **Last Resort Outdoor Risk Reduction Tips**

If you are caught outside with no safe shelter anywhere nearby, the following actions may reduce your risk of lightning strike:

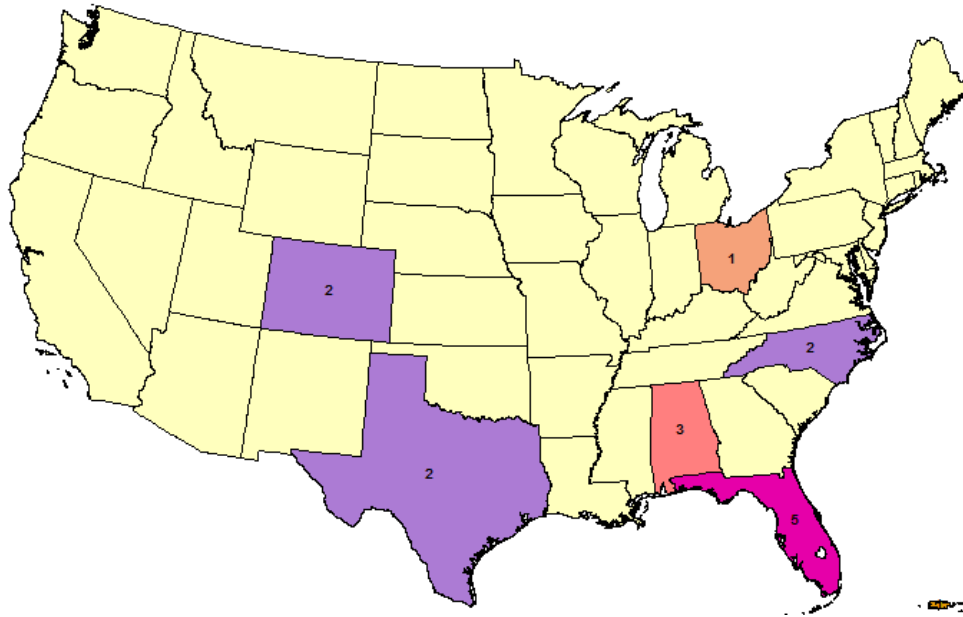
- Immediately get off elevated areas such as hills, mountain ridges or peaks.
- Never lie flat on the ground.
- Never shelter under an isolated tree.
- Never use a cliff or rocky overhang for shelter.
- Immediately get out and away from ponds, lakes, pools, and other bodies of water.
- Stay away from objects that conduct electricity (barbed wire fences, power lines, windmills, etc.)

**Protect your pets.** Outside dog houses are not lightning-safe. Dogs that are chained to trees or wire runners can easily fall victim to lightning strikes. Consider bringing your pets inside the home or garage during thunderstorms.

### **Helping a Lightning-Strike Victim**

If someone is struck by lightning, call 911 and seek immediate medical attention. Lightning victims do not carry an electrical charge and are safe to touch. Knowing first aid measures, which include cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), can help lightning-strike victims survive. American Red Cross chapters and local fire departments often offer first aid and CPR classes.

## 2017 Lightning Fatalities by State (NOAA graphic)



### Homeowners' insurance claims and lightning payout losses

According to the Insurance Information Institute, the number of homeowners insurance claims from lightning strikes and electrical surges in the U.S. rose in 2016, compared to 2015; however, the average cost that insurers paid on those claims fell.

The study, done in partnership with State Farm® found:

- More than \$825 million in lightning claims was paid out in 2016 to more than 100,000 policyholders.
- Total insured losses caused by lightning rose 4.5 percent from 2015 to 2016, although overall losses have declined 12.4 percent since 2007.
- There were 109,049 lightning claims in 2016.
- More than 50 percent of claims were related to electrical surge damaging components or wiring, while power surges from transformer or service line shorts were contributing factors, as well.

For additional information on lightning safety and protection:

[National Weather Service](#)  
[Lightning Protection Institute](#)  
[Insurance Information Institute](#)  
[Ready.gov, Thunderstorms & Lightning](#)