

# LIGHTNING... NATURE'S FIREWORKS

Lightning occurs with all thunderstorms. It averages 93 deaths and 300 injuries each year. It also causes several hundred million dollars in damage to property and forests annually. You should be aware of the dangers of lightning and how to protect yourself and your family from becoming victims. Here are some helpful facts about nature's fireworks...

- What is lightning? Lightning occurs when the action of rising and descending air within a thunderstorm separates positive and negative charges. Lightning results from the buildup and discharge of electrical energy between positively and negatively charged areas.
- The average flash of lightning could light a 100-watt light bulb for more than three months.
- Most lightning occurs within the cloud or between the cloud and ground.
- The air near a lightning strike is heated to 50,000 F- *hotter than the surface of the sun!* The rapid heating and cooling of air near the lightning channel causes a shock wave that results in **thunder**.
- To estimate the distance in miles between you and the lightning flash, count the seconds between the lightning and the thunder and divide by five.
- Most lightning deaths and injuries occur when people are caught outdoors. Most casualties occur in the summer months and during the afternoon and early evening.
- Your chances of being struck by lightning are estimated to be 1 in 600,000.
- In recent years, people have been killed by lightning while boating, swimming, golfing, bike riding, standing under a tree, riding on a lawnmower, talking on the telephone, loading a truck, playing soccer, fishing in a boat, and mountain climbing.

## Lightning Myths and Facts...

**MYTH:** If it is not raining, then there is no danger from lightning.

**FACT:** Lightning often strikes outside of heavy rain and may occur as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall.

**MYTH:** The rubber soles of shoes or rubber tires on a car will protect you from being struck by lightning.

**FACT:** 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. Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.

**MYTH:** People struck by lightning carry an electrical charge and should not be touched.

**FACT:** Lightning-strike victims carry no electrical charge and should be attended to immediately. Contact your local American Red Cross chapter for information on CPR and first aid classes.

**MYTH:** “Heat lightning” occurs after very hot summer days and poses no threat.

**FACT:** What is referred to as “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!