Lightning Awareness

There is more than one kind of lightening. Most lightning strikes that hit the ground are negatively charged and occur close to the rain area of a thunderstorm. During a thunderstorm, positive electrical charge builds in the cirrus anvil or upper part of the storm. This charge can become so intense that it will produce a positively charged groundstroke that is many times more powerful than the typical negatively charged strike.

This positive charged lightning stroke could strike many miles from the rain area – catching people by surprise. Most people assume that the rain is too far away for the lightning to strike their area. In fact, most people who are struck by lightning are hit before the rain arrives at their location or after the rain has ended. **If you see a flash and instantly hear thunder, seek shelter immediately.**

Lightning seeks the path of least resistance on its way to the ground. Since the human body is 90% water, it is a good conductor. Metal is also a good conductor. Lightning can travel easily through metal objects such as fences or railroad tracks – both of which can conduct electricity for long distances.

The 30-30 Rule

Use the 30-30 Rule to determine the threat of lightning in your area.

30 Seconds: Count the seconds between seeing lightning and hearing thunder. If this time is less than 30 seconds, lightning is still a potential threat. Seek shelter immediately.

30 Minutes: After the last lightning flash, wait 30 minutes before leaving shelter. Half of all lightning deaths occur after the storm passes. Stay in a safe area until you are sure the threat has passed.

Lightning Safety Tips

- Avoid open high ground and isolated large trees.
- Avoid water (swimming pools, lakes and rivers), beaches and boats.
- Seek shelter inside a building or an automobile, but not in a convertible or golf cart.
- Stay away from doors, windows and metal objects such as pipes or faucets.
- Stay off the telephone and away from electrical devices like computers.
- Monitor NOAA weather ratio and use the 30-30 Rule for outdoor activity.

Lightning Facts

Air in a lightning stroke is heated to 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit. This rapid heating of the air produces the shock wave that results in thunder.

A groundstroke can produce somewhere between 100 million to one billion volts of electricity.

The average peak current in a cloud-to-ground lightning stoke is 100,000 Amperes.

The length of an average cloud-to-ground lightning channel can range from two to ten miles.

For every five seconds you count between the flash and hearing thunder, lightning is one mile away.