

LIGHTNING SAFETY CHECKLIST

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, an average of 67 people are killed by lightning each year and about 300 are injured. Only flash floods and river floods cause more weather-related deaths. Churches are encouraged to establish a policy for church members and leaders conducting outside activities, particularly while at parks or camping areas that may not have adequate shelter from the elements. The following are a few best practices to consider before going to any outdoor event. Church leaders should monitor the weather conditions and forecast at least 24 hours before the day(s) of the event. In addition, an inexpensive portable weather radio is recommended for obtaining current storm data.

1. Have a plan for suspending and resuming activities. Make sure participants are aware of designated safe areas, including:
 - Fully enclosed metal vehicles with windows up
 - Substantial buildings
 - Low ground – seek cover in clumps of bushes

Avoid the following unsafe areas:

- Outdoor metal objects (i.e., flag poles, fences and gates, light poles and metal bleachers)
 - Water, including ponds, lakes, streams, pools and standing water
 - Solitary trees
 - Caves
 - Open fields
 - High ground
2. Take shelter when you see lightning or hear thunder. Wait a minimum of 30 minutes from the last observed lightning or thunder before resuming activities. Be extra cautious during this phase as the storm may not be over. Lightning can strike as far as 10 miles from a thunderstorm.
 3. If you are outside during an electrical storm and you begin to feel your hair standing on end, and/or hear a crackling noise, you may be in the lightning's electric field. Immediately remove metal objects, car keys, backpacks, even baseball caps and place your feet together, duck your head, and crouch down low in a baseball catcher's stance with hands on knees.
 4. People who have been struck by lightning do not carry an electrical charge and are safe to touch. Apply first aid immediately if you are qualified to do so. Get emergency help promptly by calling 911 or the local emergency service number.
 5. The 30/30 Rule – If lightning precedes thunder by less than 30 seconds, then the storm is close and you need to take cover. After the storm, wait at least 30 minutes before leaving shelter and resuming outside activities.

6. Seek shelter in an enclosed building if possible. Open shelters, like those at campsites and picnic areas, provide very little protection. Avoid small wooden or metal sheds. If a building is not available, get in a vehicle with a metal roof and close all windows and doors.
7. Stay away from water. Water is an excellent conductor of electricity. Electrical current can easily pass through water – including lakes, ponds, rivers and standing water such as puddles.
8. Do not wait for rain to take shelter. Take shelter as soon as you see lightning or hear thunder.
9. Place yourself at the lowest point possible. Lightning often strikes tall objects first. If no sturdy shelter is available, crouch as low as possible with feet together and place hands over ears to minimize hearing damage from thunder. Keep your distance from other people, allowing 15 feet between.
10. Stay away from trees and tall metal poles. Keep twice as far from a tree as it is tall to avoid current traveling through the ground.
11. Listen to NOAA Weather Radio or other weather sources to keep up with changing weather conditions.
12. Lightning can enter a building directly, through the ground, or through pipes or wires that extend outside.
13. Stay away from windows and doors.
14. Stay off phones and avoid touching electrical equipment and plumbing.
15. Protect property. Typical store-bought surge protectors will not protect electrical equipment from a direct lightning strike. Unplug all valuable electronics as soon as you hear thunder.

References

Zurich – Lightning Protection for Communication Systems, 2-7.002 October 1997 Country of Origin: U.S.

A severe weather primer: questions and answers about lightning http://www.nssl.noaa.gov/primer/lightning/lgt_climatology.html

Lightning Safety <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/hun/preparedness/brochures/LightningBrochure2.pdf>