

Toolbox Talk

Severe Weather – Thunderstorms

Lightning strikes the U.S. about 25 million times a year, on average striking 400 people. While only a few dozen of those strikes are fatal, the injuries survivors face can be both severe and permanent. If lightning is seen or heard, take protective action immediately. There is no work shift, chore in the yard, fish on the line, or sporting event worth your life or well-being. Here are a few facts and safety tips regarding thunderstorms at work.

Myth vs. Facts

- Myth: If it is not raining and clouds aren't over you yet, you are safe.
 - Fact: Lightning can occur up to 15 miles ahead of the storm. If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to the action. Far too often people wait for the rain to start before taking shelter, and a strike "from the clear blue" catches them off guard.
- Myth: Lightning doesn't strike the same place twice.
 - Fact: Lightning can and does strike the same place more than once. In fact the Empire State Building gets hit about 23 times per year.
- Myth: It has rubber tires, I'll be ok.
 - Fact: Not all rubber tire vehicles keep you safe. A car keeps you safe because of its metal top and structure, a bicycle or motorcycle will not offer that same protection.
- Myth: If there is no where to shelter, crouch or lay on the ground.
 - Fact: This is bad advice, you are better off to keep moving to find some type of overhead cover. Laying on the ground increases your chances of being affected by a potentially deadly ground current. In certain soil conditions the ground can be energized up to 60 feet away from the point of contact.
- Myth: Don't touch a victim of a lightning strike, you'll be electrocuted.
 - Fact: The human body cannot store electricity. Help the person immediately, they probably need CPR so do not hesitate!
- Fact: Lightning is hotter than the surface of the sun and can reach temps around 50,000 degrees!

Safety Tips

1. **Stop** activities when the symptoms arise. Increased winds, cloud cover, thunder in the distance (don't wait for rain!) Majority of people struck by lightning tried to wait until the rain started. Go inside quickly into a completely enclosed building. If no enclosed building is convenient, get inside a hard-topped vehicle.
2. **Stay** low. Working in man lifts, scaffolding, on roofs, and ladder work should be suspended when lightning is seen or thunder is heard.
3. **Listen** for the sound of thunder. If you can hear thunder, go to a safe shelter immediately.
4. **Avoid** leaning against vehicles, on fences, or hiding under trees. Get inside the vehicle or inside a building. Avoid metal. Stay away from ladders and scaffolding. If you can leave the equipment in the rain, just leave it. Rushing to carry ladders and heavy items around can cause injuries or become your lightning rod.

5. **Wait** 30 minutes to let the storm past after last lightning. If lightning can strike 15 miles ahead of a storm, it can certainly have a rouge strike after the storm. Plus everything will be wet, increasing the distance it can spread from the point of contact.

For more detailed information about HOW people get struck, please visit Weather.gov

Questions for you

1. Does your company have a clear safety policy for severe weather?