

VERDICT FOR LIGHTNING - LIGHTNING RODS

A jury in Morristown, Tennessee, has awarded a verdict for \$50,000.00 to a fourteen year old girl who was struck by lightning while under a rain shelter at Morristown Country Club. Phyllis Davis was struck last July, and has not regained consciousness. A doctor testified she may never regain consciousness. Her father, Clifford Davis, sued the country club for \$737,000.00 claiming negligence in their failing to have lightning rods on the shelter. The attorney for the country club based the defense on the premise that no one is responsible for an "act of God", however, the damages were assessed at \$50,000.00.

This court decision, plus the fact that many large trees cannot be replaced during our lifetime, and the dangers of shelter, half-way houses and clubs being struck by lightning, brought the entire matter into focus.

Lightning is the visible charge of electricity from cloud to cloud, from cloud to earth, and from earth to cloud. Lightning is normally resisted by the non-conducting air between the cloud and the ground, however, the pressure often becomes so strong that the charge breaks through the air barrier. The cloud charge seeks the path of least resistance to the earth and naturally tends to follow the shortest course, usually to some highpoint — a roof, a chimney, a tree, house, barn, or a club on a hill.

Lightning is a hot, exploding bolt of terrifying power. It hurtles from the sky without warning to kill, maim, or destroy whatever may be in its path. Here are some facts about lightning:

1. 75% of all lightning strikes upwards from the ground.
2. Country clubs which have stood for years without rods can be hit any time.
3. Lightning cannot be prevented, but it can be controlled.
4. Any type of building can be protected by lightning rods and once installed, will last indefinitely.
5. Lightning, like light, travels at the speed of 186,000 miles per second. When you see the flash of lightning, the danger is over. The bolt has already struck. The flash you see in the sky is merely the burning of the air through which the invisible bolt has passed.
6. Trees are poor conductors and offer no protection against lightning. If a tree is struck near a building, it is possible for the bolt to jump to the country club. Any tree can be made safe from lightning.
7. In the United States alone, lightning strikes approximately 9,000,000 times per year. Its annual casualty record is 600 killed and thousands injured.

Outlying areas, in which country clubs are generally located, show the greatest property destruction. Many clubs in the Chicago District are completely protected by lightning rods including the Pro Shop, the shelters and the club house. Other clubs are only partially protected, and many have no lightning protection at all.

Cost of Lightning Rod Protection

In order to give you some idea of the cost to protect a shelter, half-way house, or a club, by lightning rods, here is a summary of costs:

1. To wire a shelter house 10 feet square with a hipped roof, approximately \$55.00. A gabled roof runs \$5.00 to \$10.00 more.
2. To wire a half-way house, 20 feet by 20 feet, with hipped roof, approximately \$70.00; gabled roof, \$10.00 to \$15.00 more.
3. To wire a country club, the cost differs according to the construction and the area, however, the usual cost for the average size club runs from \$1300.00 to \$1800.00. The cost to install a lightning rod system in one large Chicago club was \$1,780.00.

Safety Rules for Protection

Many people including golfers have no knowledge of what to do during a thunderstorm, and many clubs have posted safety rules. Others are considering outlining in their paper, or club organ, these various precautions:

1. When seeking shelter, buildings constructed of steel offer better protection than the ordinary wood-frame type.
2. Do not use a telephone, radio, or television set during a thunderstorm unless absolutely necessary.
3. If in an automobile, or golf cart, remain there, as they are better protection than walking.
4. Keep away from trees, poles, or similarly exposed objects projecting skyward.
5. Out in the open, you are safer lying flat on the ground.
6. If on a golf course, do not use, or carry, a steel-shafted club, and stay away from all types of machinery. Raising golf clubs, or umbrellas, is understood to be dangerous during electrical storms, however, metal spikes on golf shoes do little to increase the hazard, according to the National Bureau of Standards.
7. Avoid isolated trees, fences, hill-tops and open spaces. A depression in the ground, a deep valley, dense woods, a grove of trees, beneath a steep or overhanging cliff, afford better protection than the open golf course.

Many country clubs today are installing a whip-antenna on the electric carts similar to that used on passenger cars, and of a length to extend above the heads of the riders. This will reasonably protect the riders against lightning while riding or sitting in an electric cart.

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14750 La Grange Road - U.S. 45

Orland Park, Illinois

Ft eldbrook 9-8484

Bob Johnson