



# No More Am I Taking Chances

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How many more chances am I going to get! I'm talking about having close calls with lightning. I've really been lucky not to be hurt by lightning considering where I've been and what I do. It's likely the same as what you do - working outdoors in Mother Nature's glory. Sometimes exposure to lightning has been out of my control. Such was the case several years ago, while hiking in the Rocky Mountains and miles away from any safe shelter. A severe thunderstorm blew up out of nowhere around my family. Luckily no one was hurt. We later learned there were things we could have done better even in that desperate situation to protect ourselves. I've also realized that at a few other times I've put myself and others in great danger when I knew better and could have done things differently. What I should have done is suspend a recreation or work activity much earlier when I knew a storm was coming.

As I get older and a little wiser, I'm not going to take as many chances. I love life too much. And how terrible would it be if someone on my crew got hurt because I didn't educate them properly on lightning safety or set a poor example by being cavalier around such a danger. I and probably you have escaped being hurt by lightning so far. Educating ourselves and our staff and clients better about lightning will hopefully save more lives in the future. Having a lightning plan in place will make a difference later, but you must take the effort to devise a plan now.

You and I work and recreate in the fastest rising segment of lightning injury occurrences in America. That segment is the area of outdoor recreation like golf and field sports, along with other outdoor activities like swimming, biking, hiking, camping, boating, etc. Farming used to represent the highest risk. Many little tractors out on open flat fields exposed lots of people to danger. Now days there are fewer people working in agriculture. And today's farmers are likely in larger, metal-surrounded, enclosed, and thus lightning-safe vehicles. Compare that to us who work in great numbers in open areas and lightning-unsafe vehicles (open utility carts and maintenance equipment).

The actual risk of being killed by lightning is relatively small, but that's not the only risk. On average about 100 deaths per year in America are attributed to lightning strikes. You have a greater chance of winning your state lottery. But death is not the only concern. Many more are struck by lightning but survive. Those people report any number of long term debilitating

symptoms. Most of these lightning injuries and deaths could have been avoided by being educated about lightning safety.

Lightning education can even help you if caught by surprise out in nature like I was in the Rocky Mountains. That day in the Rockies we climbed under a rock overhang to get out of the rain which I later learned was one of the worst places to be during a thunderstorm. Lightning could have likely hit higher up on the mountain and followed along the wet rocks right into our shelter.

Small shelters in general, whether they are on a golf course, athletic facility, or in the backyard are one of the worst places to be **even if they have lightning rods attached**. Lightning can hit far away and travel

## WHAT TO DO WHEN LIGHTNING IS NEAR

### AVOID

- Solitary trees
- Small rain and sun shelters
- Large, open areas
- Wet areas
- Elevated areas
- All metal objects including: golf clubs, golf cars, fences, electrical and maintenance machinery, and powerlines

### SEEK

- Large, permanent building
- Fully-enclosed metal vehicle (car, van or pickup truck)
- Lowest elevation area
- Dense area of trees or bushes

If sudden, close-in lightning does not permit evacuation to a safer place, crouch in a baseball catcher's position with feet together and hands on knees.

### DISCONTINUING PLAY IN COMPETITIONS

The USGA emphasizes that players in a competition have the right to stop play if they think lightning threatens them, even though the committee may not have authorized it specifically by signal (Rules 6-8 and 33-2d).

Lightning safety tips courtesy of:  
National Lightning Safety Institute  
691 Hoxter Ave., Loveland, CO 80027  
www.lightningsafety.com

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into them. What we should have done and what you should do if caught out in a desperate situation is this: Search out a low area, away from anything tall or metal like trees or fences, and position yourself at least 15 feet away from each other. Then crouch low with your feet together and protect your hearing by putting hands over your ears.

Getting caught by surprise out in nature is one thing. Your workplace and home are much easier environments to set up a safety plan. You really should implement one before this summer. There are many tips and safety plans that you can learn by doing a lightning safety search on the internet. Two good websites with scads of information on lightning are [www.lightningsafety.com](http://www.lightningsafety.com) and [www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov](http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov). I found many important guidelines and rules there to include in my safety plan. Here is what I learned:

1. Designate a responsible person to monitor weather conditions. An inexpensive portable weather radio will provide regular weather condition updates.
2. An emergency procedure should include: SUSPEND ACTIVITIES — EVACUATE PEOPLE — MONITOR CONDITIONS — RESUME ACTIVITIES. Identify safe and unsafe locations beforehand.
3. People who have been struck by lightning do not carry an electric charge and are safe to handle. Apply first aid immediately, if you are qualified to do so. Get emergency help promptly.

**SAFE AREAS INCLUDE:**

- Fully enclosed metal vehicles with windows up.
- Substantial and permanent buildings.

**UNSAFE AREAS INCLUDE:**

- Small structures including huts and rain shelters.
- Nearby metallic objects like fences, gates, instrumentation and electrical equipment, wires, and power poles.
- Also — AVOID trees, AVOID water, AVOID open fields, AVOID high ground, AVOID using hard-wired telephones and headsets.

A lightning safety plan that has been adopted by such prominent associations as the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), NATA (National Athletic Trainers Association) and the AMS (American Meteorological Society) uses the 30/30 rule. This rule states that you, your crew, and clients should go to a safe shelter if the time between lightning and thunder is 30 seconds or less. Then stay there 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder. Or to think of it in simpler terms — The National Lightning Safety Institute (one of the above websites) puts it this way, “If you can see it (lightning), flee it; if

you can hear it (thunder), clear it.”

I’ve witnessed way too many situations where golfers and outdoor athletic events placed people in very grave situations. I hope you can bring some of this education to the powers-to-be at one of your next board and/or staff meetings. Advance planning is the single most important means to achieve lightning safety.

I realize it’s very hard to delay an important construction project, postpone tee times, or stop an athletic event. But just remember that lightning can happen in half a second. In that instant, the lightning flash superheats the surrounding air to a temperature five times hotter than that on the surface of the sun. We’ve all seen a tree that has exploded from a lightning strike. The moisture in the sapwood turns to steam resulting in the explosion. You could read about what happens to humans hit by lightning at one of the above websites. It’s similar to trees. And I’m not taking those chances anymore. ♣



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