

Lightning Safety Awareness Week

June 24-30, 2007

Lightning in Montana

Montana has had 8 reported deaths and 24 reported injuries from lightning, with records going back to 1961. There are many reports of more lightning deaths though that never made it into the databases the National Weather Service has. One fact many people may not know is that Montana averages about 600,000 cloud to ground flashes a year, and is ranked 3rd in the nation for deaths if you weigh it to include population. Many people who receive indirect hits do not seek medical attention, but they could still suffer minor injuries from the strike.

The activities that were occurring when people were struck in Montana include golfing, farming/ranching, being on a lake or river, riding in an open vehicle, maintaining roads, riding a horse and bow hunting. We've already had one death in Montana this year due to lightning when a person who was fishing on Canyon Ferry Reservoir was struck and killed. Ages of the victims in Montana have ranged from teens to a 102 year old man.

In Montana, lightning tends to be the most intense from mid-May through September. It's not unheard of to have lightning reported in every month of the year though. Sometimes warm winter days can cause "thundersnow" and you will see lightning during a snowstorm. Most of the flashes in the western portion of the state are from noon to 9 pm, while the eastern portion of the state is from 4 pm to 2 am.

The best thing you can do is go indoors when you hear thunder, or see lightning approaching your area. If you are hiking, get out of the open, but do not stand under the only tree in an area! A grove of trees would be better. If you are near your vehicle, such as at a ballpark, swimming pool or amphitheater, go to your vehicle and wait for the storm to pass by. *A dugout or pool locker room are not safe facilities to be in during an electrical storm.* They have many openings to the outdoors and lots of metal in the area.

When farming, a tractor with a full metal cab and windows around it should be safe, but if you are in an open cab, seeking shelter in a vehicle or sturdy building is the safest thing you can do.

If you are recreating on a lake, make sure to head back to the boat ramps as soon as you see storms in the distance. Ramps will get busy and there may be a wait to load your boat up.

For more information on lightning safety, visit the Lightning Safety Awareness Week website at: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov>