

# Take Extra Precautions From Lightning Strikes

RALEIGH -- Human Resources Secretary Phillip J. Kirk, Jr., today urged North Carolina citizens to take extra precautions to protect themselves from possible lightning strikes when thunderstorms threaten.

According to the State Center for Health Statistics, there were 133 deaths caused by lightning from 1960-1984, and a check of death certificates for 1985 shows three deaths resulting from lightning.

National Weather Service figures indicate that this is the second highest number of lightning related fatalities in the nation during that 25-year span. Only Florida surpassed North Carolina's rate.

"Officials at the weather service feel that North Carolina has a higher number of lightning related deaths because many of our citizens participate in farming or outdoor activities where the potential exposure to thunderstorms and lightning is greater," Kirk explained.

"North Carolina also has a fairly high number of thunderstorm days each year, with 40-50 such days in the eastern and piedmont areas, and 50-60 in the western portion," he added.

State Health Director Dr. Ronald H. Levine pointed out that the vast majority of deaths both nationally and in North Carolina, occur during the summer months when people are more likely to be outdoors.

Levine suggested that people should follow these National Weather Service guidelines to protect themselves from possible lightning strikes when thunderstorms threaten:

- get inside a house or large building, or inside an all-metal vehicle (except for a convertible);
- avoid using the telephone except for emergencies;
- follow these precautions if it is impossible to get inside during a thunderstorm:
  - don't stand beneath a natural lightning rod such as a tall, isolated tree in an open area;
  - avoid standing above the surrounding landscape, such as on a hilltop, in an open field, on the beach;
  - get away from open water; avoid fishing from a small boat;
  - get away from tractors and other metal farm equipment; motorcycles; scooters, bicycles and golf carts; and put down golf clubs;
  - stay away from wire fences, clotheslines, metal pipes, rails and other metallic paths which carry lightning to you from a distance;
  - avoid standing in small isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas;
- in a forest, seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees; and in open areas, go to a low place such as a ravine or valley;
- be alert for flash floods;
- if you are isolated in a level field and feel your hair stand on end - indicating lightning is about to strike - drop to your knees and bend forward putting your hands on your knees. Do not lie flat on the ground.

National Weather Service statistics indicate that lightning kills an average of just over 100 people and injures another 250 each year in the United States. The highest number killed in North Carolina over the past 25 years was 16 in 1961 and 12 in 1960.

He added that quick first aid could save some of these victims from death and serious injury.

"We know from experience

that the lives of many people struck by lightning are saved because of the quick action of persons with them," Levine emphasized.

"Knowing and using just a few first aid measures could mean the difference between

life and death for some lightning victims."

He noted that when a group is affected, those who are "apparently dead" should be treated first. If the victims are not breathing, then mouth-to-mouth resuscita-

tion should be administered within 4-6 minutes or less to prevent irreversible brain damage.

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation is necessary for victims who are not breathing and have no pulse.

However, CPR should only be administered by persons with proper training.

"Victims who are knocked unconscious but are still breathing will probably recover quickly, but they should be checked by medical

personnel to be sure there are no irregular heart rhythms or other hidden effects," Levine concluded. "All victims should be taken to a hospital as soon as possible so that they can be properly evaluated and treated."

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