

## **How can I avoid being struck by lightning?**

Going indoors during a thunderstorm is by far the best way to avoid lightning. New guidelines recommend taking shelter as soon as you notice thunder arriving less than 30 seconds after a lightning flash. Since it takes five seconds for thunder to travel one mile, the 30-second interval means a flash is less than six miles away. This, in turn, means that the next flash might strike your area soon. Outdoor activities such as baseball or football games should be interrupted for shelter as soon as the 30-second rule is met. (An entire football team of 11 players was killed by a lightning strike in Africa in the fall of 1998.)

Shelter is not failsafe. Lightning can strike through telephones, except for the cellular variety. You should avoid taking showers or standing by windows, screen doors, or patios. To protect household appliances, unplug them before (but not during!) electrical storms.

Outdoors, the idea is to avoid being near--or being--the highest object around. Get away from isolated trees, metal fences, wire clotheslines, and the like, and avoid standing in an exposed area or near water. If you are the tallest thing around, or in a boat on open water, crouch down to reduce your height (but don't lie flat). Lay down metal sports equipment and dismount bicycles. Take especially swift action if your hair stands on end, as that means charged particles are starting to use your body as a pathway. The safest form of vehicle is one with a fully enclosed, all-metal body, which helps to channel electricity around the interior. Make sure the car's windows and doors are completely closed.

Finally, remember that lightning can, and often does, strike the same spot more than once--even the same person. U.S. park ranger Roy Sullivan reportedly was struck seven times between 1942 and 1977.