

LIGHTNING:

TIPS FOR BEING SAFE

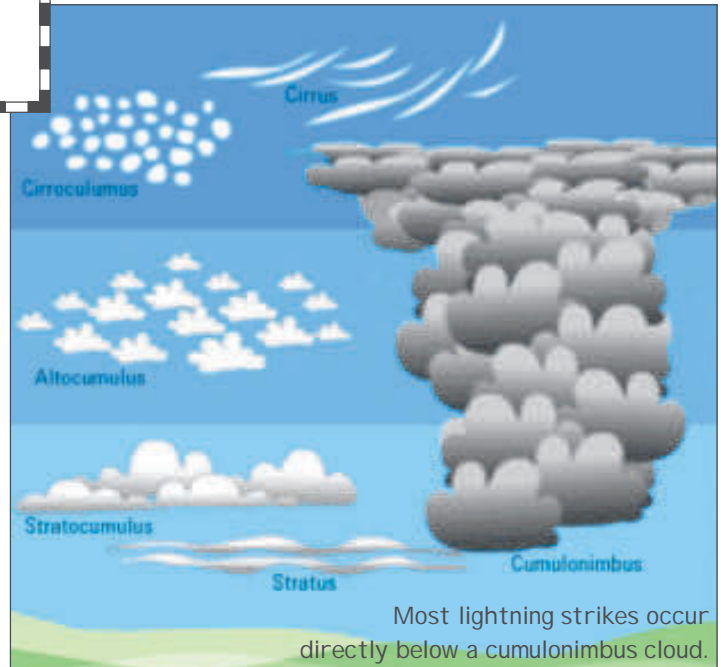
Most lightning fatalities take place on, in or near the water while people are participating in recreational activities.

In the United States, dozens of people are killed each year by lightning. Survivors of lightning strikes suffer from a variety of long lasting and debilitating symptoms including memory loss, attention deficits, sleep disorders, and numbness.

The basic tenet of lightning safety is the **30/30 RULE**: When you see lightning, count out loud until you hear thunder. If it takes 30 seconds or less, seek shelter and stay there for 30 minutes after seeing the last lightning bolt or hearing the last clap of thunder.

OTHER POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- **Get off the water:** Boaters should head for the shore and seek protection as soon as they hear thunder.
- **Avoid lone trees:** The highest objects attract lightning. Therefore, stay away from isolated trees. (An aside: you are much safer in a forest than you are near a lone tree in an open field.)
- **Spread out:** Members of a group should stay 50 feet apart to avoid multiple injuries. If you are far enough away from a person who is hit you will be able to assist them.
- **Squat down:** If you actually see lightning striking, stop moving to safer terrain and assume what the National Weather Service calls the *lightning desperation position*. You should crouched down, shoes touching, resting on the balls of your feet to minimize exposure to the ground, with your chin on your chest and your hands covering your ears so that the crack of the lightning strike doesn't damage your ear drums. A thorough discussion of the rational for this is explained NOLS article listed below.
- **Take off your watch:** Metal could heat up causing severe burns if you are hit. Besides avoiding obvious metal conductors, wet ropes (and wet gear?) are also excellent conductors and should be avoided.
- **Help a victim:** Lightning strike victims do NOT carry an electrical charge and should be attended to immediately. Cardiac arrest and irregularities, burns, and nerve damage are common in cases where people are struck by lightning. However, with proper treatment, including CPR if necessary, most victims survive a lightning strike.



EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was adapted from one in a long-ago RMSKC newsletter which gave credit to an article by Vernon Loeb in the *Los Angeles Times*. Information found on the following website was also helpful: <http://www.weather.gov/media/gid/lightning.pdf>. Check NOLS for excellent explanations and guidance on the subject: <http://www.nols.edu/nolspro/pdf/OutdoorLightningRiskManagement-Gookin.pdf>