



Thunderstorms and Lightning

What are thunderstorms and lightning?

A thunderstorm is a storm which includes lightning and thunder. Lightning is the flashing of light, which is produced by an electrical charge between clouds or between a cloud and the earth.

Thunder is the rumbling sound that is heard after lightning. It comes from a change in the air following the electrical charge from lightning.

Thunderstorms and lightning can be very dangerous. Some thunderstorms hit without warning while others can be seen approaching. It is important to recognize thunderstorm danger signs (dark, threatening clouds and distant lightning or thunder) and prepare to take shelter.

Why are thunderstorms and lightning dangerous?

Thunderstorms can produce heavy rains. This may result in flooding causing hazardous driving conditions, mudslides, downed trees, power outages and more. Lightning is unpredictable, striking anytime and anyplace, sometimes resulting in property damage and injury or death to people and animals. Lightning can strike outside of heavy rain, occurring miles away from the actual storm.

Know your terms!

Severe Thunderstorm Watch tells you *when* and *where* severe thunderstorms are likely to occur. Stay tuned to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio and local media for more information.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning means severe weather is occurring or is imminent. Take immediate action to protect life and property.

Protective measures for people and animals:

- Before a thunderstorm or any other emergency strikes, prepare a disaster supply kit. Read further for a list of disaster kit contents. Remove dead or rotting trees and branches around your home. Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage. Shutter windows and secure outside doors. If shutters are not available, close blinds, shades or curtains. Bring pets indoors. Safely secure other animals in or under appropriate shelter.
- During a thunderstorm, immediately seek shelter in a sturdy, enclosed structure indoors. Avoid bathing or showering. Avoid using electrical devices or appliances. Use a corded telephone for emergencies only. Cellular and cordless telephones are safe to use.

- If you're caught outdoors, avoid natural lightning rods such as tall isolated trees in open areas; hilltops, open fields, the beach or a boat on the water; isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas; and anything metal such as tractors, farm equipment, motorcycles, golf carts and bicycles. Seek low-lying areas such as under a thick growth of small trees or a ravine or valley. Fully enclosed metal vehicles (cars, trucks, buses, etc.) do provide some protection from lightning and should be utilized when no sturdy, enclosed structure is available.
- If you feel your hair stand on end, this means lightning is about to strike. Quickly squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands over your ears. Place your head between your knees. Try to make yourself as small as possible by forming a ball shape with your body. Do not lie flat on the ground.

Disaster Supply Kit:

- Water (one gallon per person per day for at least three days).
- Non-perishable foods and any special dietary products (enough for at least three days).
- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries.
- First aid kit and manual.
- Small tool kit and non-electric can opener.
- Essential (most needed) medicines.
- Cash and credit cards.
- An extra change of clothes and sturdy shoes.
- Personal hygiene supplies.

Safety recommendations after the thunderstorm:

- Stay tuned to your battery-operated radio for emergency updates.
- Stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.
- If someone has been struck by lightning, call 911 immediately. Check the person's breathing and pulse. Administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) if needed. If the person is breathing and has a pulse, look for other signs of injury like burns and loss of hearing and eyesight.
- Avoid moving water or flooded areas.
- Report any downed power lines or outages. Stay away from downed lines.
- If the power is off for more than 4 hours or the food temperature is 40 degrees or above for two hours or more, dispose of all refrigerated food. Frozen food can be safely eaten, cooked or refrozen if it still has ice crystals on it. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Report any damage to your insurance agent.
- Inform local authorities of any health and safety issues in your area.
- If clean up is needed, pace yourself. Don't overdo it. Drink enough water, eat well, rest, and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water when handling debris. Wear sturdy work boots and gloves.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health or visit our website at www.guilfordcountync.gov or visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency at www.fema.gov, or the American Red Cross at www.redcross.org

Free language assistance is available upon request.