

Lightning Safety For Campers and Hikers

Camper and hikers must manage their lightning risk

The two most deadly places for you to be during a thunderstorm are in open spaces or under trees. Campers and hikers are usually in one of these two places.

Campers and hikers have two choices:

1. Change your outdoor plans to avoid lightning risk.
2. Minimize your risk by knowing and following basic safety guidelines.

If you go, inform yourself on weather conditions and be prepared to take protective action

If you follow your camping and hiking plans, listen to weather forecasts before you go so you know what to expect. While outdoors, keep an eye all around you for signs of changing weather conditions such as cloud build-up, quick changes in temperature, and increasing winds. Thunderstorms rarely sneak up on anyone who's watching. At the early signs of thunderstorms, stop your activities that increase your risk and quickly take action to minimize your risk. That means stop hiking up the mountain and start back down quickly.

Safety Tips for Campers and Hikers.

During a thunderstorm, no place outside is 100% safe from lightning. Understanding that, here are some guidelines to help you minimize your lightning risk.

Plan to be done hiking by the time the thunderstorms start

Most summer thunderstorms tend to form in early to mid-afternoon. Plan your hike during the early morning and plan to be off the mountain by the time the thunderstorms arrive. Thunderstorms may not behave as expected – stay alert to the weather and be prepared to turn back earlier as needed.

Stay low and stay away from tall trees, metal, and water

If you're still outdoors with no buildings or vehicles nearby and lightning is close to you, follow these steps:

Step 1: Quickly find a low area or slope with short trees or shrubs. Your goal is to be the smallest target possible. Avoid tall or isolated trees. Avoid areas with loose rocks above your head that can fall on you. Avoid utility poles and fences. Make sure your low area is not a natural drainage way about to be filled with rain run-off.

Step 2: Crouch down into a ball on the balls of your feet. Your goal is to be the smallest target possible with the least contact with the ground.

Step 3: Wait 30 minutes until the last lightning to resume your hiking.

Setting up camp to minimize exposure to lightning

Understanding there is no safe place to camp during thunderstorms, you can pick a campsite that lessens your risk. At your campsite, your tent should not be the tallest object around. You should not camp under or near a tall or isolated tree, close to a metal fence, or on a hilltop.

Watch for thunderstorms and use the 30/30 rule

If you're car camping or RVing and thunderstorms develop, use the 30/30 rule. Seeking shelter in your metal-topped vehicle is the best option. Your tent is not safe.

The 30/30 rule:

Step 1: When you see lightning, count the seconds until you hear thunder.

Step 2: If this time is 30 seconds or less, quickly go inside your metal-topped vehicle, close the windows, and don't touch the metal frame. If you're at an improved campground that has a substantial central recreation building, go inside that building.

Step 3: Wait at least 30 minutes after seeing the last lightning or hearing the last thunder before going back outside.

If someone is struck by lightning in a remote area

If the victim's heart stopped or they stopped breathing, immediately administer CPR. If there are several people in your group, send someone for help.