

Pat Quinn, Governor
Joe Klinger, Interim Director

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IEMA, NWS to Promote Lightning Safety Awareness throughout June

*Nearly 70 percent of lightning fatalities, injuries occur
at outdoor recreation events*

SPRINGFIELD – Warm weather is finally here and people throughout Illinois are taking advantage of the balmy temperatures to enjoy their favorite outdoor activities. But warm weather often brings with it thunderstorms and dangerous lightning that can be deadly. In fact, in the U.S., an average of 58 people are killed and more than 1,000 people are injured by lightning each year.

To promote lightning safety, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and the National Weather Service (NWS) join together each year during the third week of June for an awareness week. This year, however, the two organizations are expanding their efforts by observing Lightning Safety Awareness Month throughout June as part of IEMA's 12-Month Preparedness Campaign.

"While no one can completely eliminate the risk of being struck by lightning, you can greatly reduce your risk of becoming a lightning casualty by following some basic rules," said IEMA Interim Director Joe Klinger. "Throughout the month of June, we'll be working with the National Weather Service to make people more aware of the simple precautions they can take to stay safe when thunderstorms occur."

Klinger said awareness efforts throughout the U.S. appear to be working. In 2009, 34 people were killed by lightning nationwide, but no lightning fatalities were reported in Illinois. On average, 67 percent of lightning fatalities and injuries occur outdoors at recreation events (baseball and soccer games, lakes and on golf courses) and under or near trees.

"Staying safe from lightning is very easy to do. If you hear a rumble of thunder or you see a flash of lightning, immediately seek shelter. There are two safe places to seek shelter - in a building with the windows and doors closed or in a hard-topped vehicle with the windows up," said Chris Miller, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the NWS in Lincoln.

IEMA and the NWS offer the following tips for staying safe when thunderstorms approach:

Outdoor lightning safety tips:

- No place outside is safe when thunderstorms are in the area.
- If you hear thunder, lightning is close enough to strike you.
- When you hear thunder, immediately move to a safe shelter.
- Safe shelter is a substantial building or inside an enclosed, metal-topped vehicle.
- Stay in the safe shelter at least 30 minutes after you hear the last clap of thunder.

If there is no safe shelter anywhere nearby:

- Seek lower elevation areas.
- Never use a tree for shelter.
- Immediately get out and away from pools, lakes and other bodies of water.
- Stay away from all metallic objects (fences, power lines, poles, etc.).
- Do not raise umbrellas or golf clubs above you.

Indoor lightning safety tips:

- Stay off corded phones, computers and other electrical equipment that put you in direct contact with electricity.
- Avoid plumbing, including sinks, baths and faucets.
- Stay away from windows and doors, and stay off porches.
- Do not lie on concrete floors and do not lean against concrete walls.

For additional tips on lightning safety visit the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov or contact IEMA at 217-785-9888.