

*Issues affecting our treasured coastlines*



## Beach Briefs - July 20, 2015

# Lightening Deaths Are Double Those at This Time Last Year



As of July 8, 2015, 17 people have died from lightning strikes in the United States. This is double the average number of year-to-date lightning fatalities over the past five years (2010-2014). Florida is the lightning capital of the United States. Because of the frequency of electrical storms, Florida leads the nation in fatalities and injuries caused by lightning. According to the National Lightning Safety Institute, 126 people in Florida died from lightning strikes between 1990 and 2003. It is estimated that 10 times as many people are injured by lightning's powerful currents.

Captiva has not had any lightning strike incidents recently so there is nothing to worry about - right? Well, not really. Just last July a man was killed and two teenagers were injured by a lightning strike on Fort Myers Beach. Earth Networks' Total Lightning Network detected 16,622 lightning flashes and 2,372 cloud-to-ground strikes within a 50 mile radius of Fort Myers Beach on that day between 11 a.m. and 3:15 p.m. Captiva is well within the 50 mile radius. The same week, a Lee County Sheriff's Office patrol car was struck by lightning. The deputy driving the car had to pull over when its engine shut off. Officials say the emergency lights atop the vehicle

were shattered. Fortunately the deputy was not injured.

There are several possible reasons for this year's increase in lightning strike deaths: more convective activity across the country; an improved economy resulting in more people taking vacations; people taking more risks than usual; and the element of chance. But the most important issue is behavior: people should go indoors when they hear thunder and often they don't!

The National Weather Service warns that if you can hear thunder, you could be struck by lightning. Lightning can strike even if it is as far away as 10 miles. As soon as you see lightning, count in seconds until you hear thunder. If the thunder is heard more than 30 seconds later, it

means it is more than 10 miles away. If you hear thunder less than 30 seconds later, seek shelter and remain there for at least 30 minutes after the last thunder clap is heard.

If you are outdoors, avoid all metal objects, water, trees, open spaces and ground that is higher than surrounding areas. Seek shelter in a building with electricity and/or plumbing or a metal-topped vehicle with the windows closed. Picnic shelters, dugouts, small buildings without plumbing or electricity are not safe.

If you are inside during a storm, the National Lightning Safety Institute advises you to stay off the phone and keep away from windows and doors. Electrical current from a lightning strike can run through the wires in your house so stay off the computer and avoid using electrical appliances.

Play it safe! Staying outside just a little longer or talking on the phone as a storm approaches is simply not worth the risk.

**When  
Thunder  
Roars,  
Go Indoors!**

**STOP all activities.**

**Seek shelter in a substantial building  
or hard-topped vehicle.**

**Wait 30 minutes after the storm to  
resume activities.**

 [www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov](http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov) 

## Lightning Myths

### LIGHTNING MYTH #1

The tallest objects in a storm don't always get struck by lightning. Taller objects are closer to the clouds but lightning can strike the ground at a close distance to a tall object. Taller objects may have a higher possibility of a strike but where lightning is concerned, the strike path is not predictable.

### LIGHTNING MYTH #2

Surge protectors won't save your electronics if lightning strikes your power line. Surge protectors provide protection for power surges in the line from the power company but not from lightning. To really guard against strike damage, you need a lightning arrester.

**LIGHTNING MYTH #3**

Rubber tires aren't why you're safe in a car during a lightning storm. You're safe in a car because the lightning will travel around the surface of the vehicle and then go to ground.

**LIGHTNING MYTH #4**

Rubber shoes do nothing to protect you from lightning. An inch of rubber is not going to impede the flow of current in any significant way. Unless your soles are half a mile thick, you're not protected.

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The Captiva Erosion Prevention District is comprised of 5 elected, unpaid Commissioners dedicated to preserving and maintaining Captiva's beaches and shorelines. For more information on CEPD, click on [mycepd.com](http://mycepd.com) or join our email list by clicking on [mycepd@mycepd.com](mailto:mycepd@mycepd.com)

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