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MEMA WARNS OF LIGHTNING'S DANGERS

FRAMINGHAM, MA - Thunderstorms are very common in the Spring and Summer months, and despite their small size, in comparison to hurricanes and blizzards, all thunderstorms are potentially dangerous.

“Every thunderstorm produces lightning and has the potential to produce associated dangers such as tornadoes, destructive winds, hail and flash flooding,” stated Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Director Don Boyce. “As we have witnessed, lightning strikes, throughout Massachusetts, have proven deadly, reinforcing the fact that the threat of a thunderstorm must be taken seriously.”

Of the estimated 100,000 thunderstorms each year in the U.S., about 10% are classified as severe, meaning they produce hail, at least ¾” in diameter, have winds of 58mph or higher, or produce a tornado.

MEMA offers thunderstorm, and more particularly, lightning safety tips:

Before the Thunderstorm

- Know the terms used by weather forecasters
 1. Severe Thunderstorm Watch – Tells where and when severe thunderstorms are likely to occur. Watch the sky and stay tuned the Media.
 2. Severe Thunderstorm Warning – Issued when severe weather has been reported by spotters or indicated on radar. Warnings indicate imminent danger to life and property to those in the path of the storm.
- Before a thunderstorm strikes, keep an eye on the sky. Look for darkening skies, flashes of light, or increasing wind.
- If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to the storm to be affected by lightning, and should go inside to safe shelter immediately.
- Thunderstorms can occur singly, in clusters or in lines. The typical thunderstorm is 15 miles in diameter, producing heavy rain for a brief period from 30 to 60 minutes.
- When a thunderstorm approaches, secure outdoor objects that could be blown away or cause damage. Shutter windows, if possible, and secure outside doors.

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- Remember that lightning can strike up to 10 miles ahead of or after the arrival of the storm. Listen to weather forecasts on NOAA Weather Radio, or to local radio and television stations for the latest information. In general, lightning will travel the easiest route from the clouds to the ground, which means it often strikes the tallest object.
- During this season people are taking part in activities that place them in locations most vulnerable to being struck by lightning, such as on golf courses, ball fields, beaches and large bodies of water. In the U.S., an average of 300 people are injured and 80 killed each year by lightning, which is more than tornadoes or hurricanes.

During the Thunderstorm

- If you are caught outside during a thunderstorm, you should protect yourself from lightning by going to a low-lying, open place away from trees, poles or metal object, which can serve as a natural lightning rod. (Make sure the place you pick is not subject to flooding).
- Make yourself the smallest target possible by squatting low to the ground and by placing your hands on your knees with your head between them. Be as low to the ground as possible, with as little of your body touching the ground as possible. (Don't lie flat; this will make you a larger target!).
- Do not stand on a hilltop, in an open field, on a beach or in a boat on the water.
- If boating, or swimming, get to land immediately.
- Avoid isolated sheds or small structures in open areas.
- Get away from anything metal such as tractors, farm equipment, motorcycles, golf carts, golf clubs, bicycles, wire fences, clotheslines, metal pipes, rails, and other metallic paths that could carry lightning to you from a distance.
- In a forest, seek shelter in a low area under a growth of smaller trees.
- If indoors, avoid metallic objects and fixtures.
- Avoid showering or bathing. Plumbing and bathroom fixtures can conduct electricity.
- Avoid using a corded telephone, except for emergencies. Cordless or cellular telephones are safe to use.
- Unplug appliances and other electrical items such as computers. Turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can cause serious damage.
- Use your battery operated NOAA Weather Radio for updates from local officials.
- Note that rubber-soled shoes and rubber tires provide NO protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection, if you are not touching metal. Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA, go to www.mass.gov/mema.