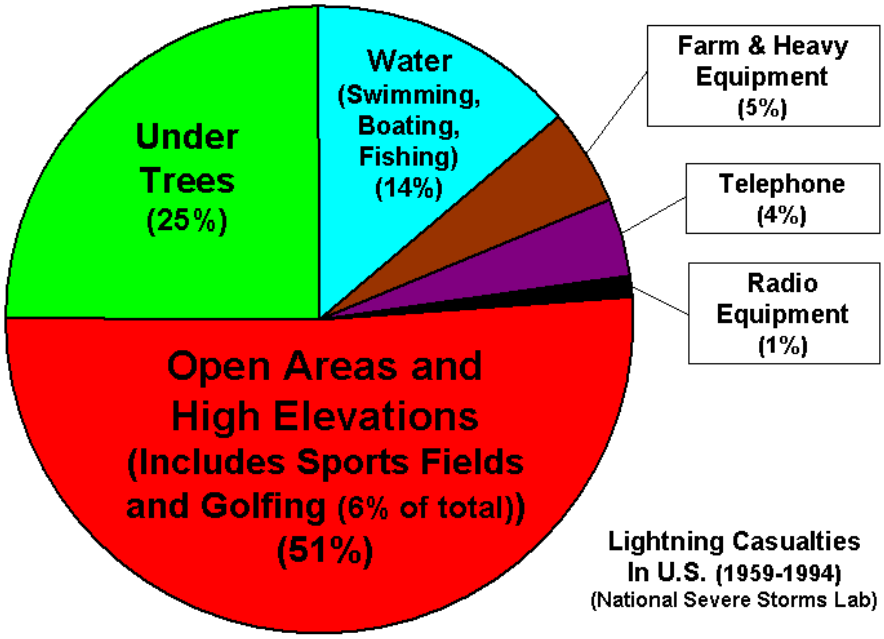
Lightning Safety Awareness - An Educational Problem

While many people think they are aware of the dangers of lightning, the vast majority are not. Lightning can strike as much as 10 miles away from the rain area of a thunderstorm; that's about the distance that you are able to hear the thunder from the storm. While virtually all people take some protective actions during the most dangerous part of thunderstorms, many leave themselves vulnerable to being struck by lightning as thunderstorms approach, depart, or are nearby. Although some victims are struck directly by the lightning discharge, many victims are struck as the current moves in and along the ground.

Where are people when lightning incidents occur? The chart below gives a breakdown.



Gender of Victims: 84% Male, 16% Female

Months of Most Incidents: July 30%, August 22%, June 21%

Lightning Safety

Outdoor Lightning Risk Reduction When a Safe Location is not Nearby

Remember, there is NO safe place outside in a thunderstorm. If you absolutely can't get to safety, this section *may* help you slightly lessen the threat of being struck by lightning while outside. Don't kid yourself--you are NOT safe outside.

Being stranded outdoors when lightning is striking nearby is a harrowing experience. Your first and only truly safe choice is to get to a safe building or vehicle. If you are camping, climbing, on a motorcycle or bicycle, boating, scuba diving, or enjoying other outdoor activities and cannot get to a safe vehicle or building, follow these **last resort** tips. They will *not* prevent you from being struck by lightning, but may *slightly* lessen the odds.

- Know the weather patterns of the area. For example, in mountainous areas, thunderstorms typically develop in the early afternoon, so plan to hike early in the day and be down the mountain by noon.
- Listen to the weather forecast for the outdoor area you plan to visit. Â The forecast may be very different from the one near your home. If there is a high chance of thunderstorms, stay inside.

These actions may *slightly* reduce your risk of being struck by lightning:

- If camping, hiking, etc., far from a safe vehicle or building, avoid open fields, the top of a hill or a ridge top.
- Stay away from tall, isolated trees or other tall objects. If you are in a forest, stay near a lower stand of trees.
- If you are camping in an open area, set up camp in a valley, ravine or other low area. Remember, a tent offers NO protection from lighting.
- Stay away from water, wet items (such as ropes) and metal objects (such as fences and poles). Water and metal are excellent conductors of electricity. Remember, lightning can strike up to 10 miles from the rain area. Plus the current from a lightning flash can easily travel for long distances

Indoors

* Stay there! The best protection from lightning is a house or other substantial building. However, stay away from windows, doors, and metal pipes.

* Do not use electric appliances during the storm. Turn off sensitive equipment such as televisions, VCR's, and computers.

* Telephone use is the leading cause of indoor lightning injuries in the United States. Do not make a call unless it is an emergency.

Factsheets, Publications, Statistics,
Policy Statements, Lightning Strikes, More Links