

NOAA study finds fishing tops US lightning death activities

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Credit: NOAA

NOAA's National Weather Service has discovered that 64 percent of lightning deaths since 2006 occurred while people were participating in leisure activities, with fishing topping the list at 26 deaths. John Jensenius, a lightning safety specialist with the National Weather Service, conducted the study by examining demographic information for 238 deaths attributed to lightning over the last seven years. NOAA released these findings on the first day of National Lightning Safety Awareness Week to call attention to the danger of outdoor activities during a thunderstorm.

Of the 152 deaths associated with leisure activities, fishing is followed by camping (15 deaths), boating (14 deaths), soccer (12 deaths) and golf

(8 deaths). The remaining 77 people were struck by lightning while participating in a number of other leisure activities like enjoying the beach, swimming, walking and running, riding recreational vehicles, and picnicking or relaxing in their yard. Between 2006 and 2012, 82 percent of people killed by lightning were male.

"When people think of lightning deaths, they usually think of golf," Jensenius said. "While every outdoor activity is dangerous when a thunderstorm is in the area, outdoor activities other than golf lead to more lightning deaths. [NOAA](#) has made a concerted effort to raise lightning awareness in the golf community since we began the campaign in 2001, and we believe our outreach has made a huge difference since lightning-related deaths on [golf courses](#) have decreased by 75 percent."

Jensenius said the large number of fishing, camping and boating lightning deaths may occur because these activities require extra time to get to a safe place. "People often wait far too long to head to safety when a storm is approaching, and that puts them in a dangerous and potentially deadly situation," he said.

Prior to the lightning safety campaign, lightning killed an average of 73 people each year in the United States. Since the National Weather Service launched the campaign, the average has dropped to 37. Seven people have died from lightning strikes so far this year.

The best way for people to protect themselves against lightning injury or [death](#) is to monitor the weather and postpone or cancel outdoor activities when thunderstorms are in the forecast. Lightning can strike from 10 miles away, so if people can hear thunder, they are in danger of being struck by lightning. The only safe places to be during a [thunderstorm](#) are in a building with four walls and a roof or in a car. A hut, cabana, tent, or other rain shelter will not protect a person from being struck by lightning.

Lightning safety awareness events:

National [Weather Service](#) forecast offices throughout the country will promote lightning safety at local events all week. Here are a few highlights:

- Lightning [Safety Awareness](#) Week kicked off on Friday, June 21 in Parker, Colorado. NOAA experts joined partners from the Lightning Protection Institute, the Colorado Department of Homeland Security, local fire officials, other lightning safety partners and local TV meteorologist Jeff Womack for a public open house safety event at South Metro Fire Station #45. After hearing lightning safety education talks, visitors toured the fire station and spoke with lightning experts.
- On June 22, the Binghamton, NY, forecast office participated in the Moscow Country Run in Moscow, PA, by announcing the starting commands of the race. The run was a combination lightning safety event and fundraiser for Jason Penecek, who was struck by lightning while attending the Pocono 400 NASCAR race at Pocono Raceway last August. Jason, who lost his best friend of almost 20 years during the storm, continues to struggle with debilitating injuries. The run consisted of three events: The Lightning Bolt 5k, the One-Mile Shock Walk and the Kids Thunder Run. Jason's experience as a lightning strike victim and journey back to health inspired his sister and fellow runner, Kimberly McHale, to create a local Lightning Awareness Group, which visits local schools and community events to promote lightning safety awareness.
- On June 28, the [National Weather Service](#) will team up with the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park to promote lightning safety awareness at the major league baseball game. Meteorologists from the NWS Boston Forecast Office will host an information booth, and lightning safety information will appear on the video

board during the 5th inning of the game against the Toronto Blue Jays. Yellow [lightning](#) safety foam visors will go to 300 young fans.

Provided by NOAA Headquarters

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