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Lightning Safety Awareness Week Underway

(MSC News)--Summer is the peak season for lightning, one of weather's most deadly occurrences. On average over the past 50 years, at least one Kansan has died from a lightning each year. Lightning Safety Awareness Week (June 23 to 29) sponsored by the Kansas Division of Emergency Management, the National Weather Service, and the American Red Cross, is a nationwide effort to encourage individuals, families businesses and communities to be a force of nature and avoid the dangers of lightning.

Since the campaign began 13 years ago, the average number of lightning deaths in the U.S. has decreased from 73 to 54 but lightning continues to be one of the top three storm-related killers in the United States. In addition, lightning injures many more people than it kills and leaves some victims with life-long health problems. Between the years of 1959 and 2013, 66 people have been killed in Kansas and more than 200 injured.

“Just remember when you hear thunder, lightning is close enough to strike you,” said Angee Morgan, deputy director of Kansas Emergency Management. “When you hear thunder take shelter and remain sheltered for 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder.”

Each year, more than 400 people in the United States are struck by lightning while working outside, at sports events, on the beach, out at the lake, mowing the lawn or during other outdoor activities. On average, 58 people are killed each year by lightning in the United States and several hundred more left with permanent disabilities. There have been seven lightning fatalities in 2013.

The Kansas Division of Emergency Management, National Weather Service and American Red Cross have joined forces to create the Lightning Safety Awareness Campaign. These groups provide the information below and tips to help people stay safe when lightning strikes.

Hundreds of people are struck by lightning across the country each year, but survive. Survivors may experience memory loss, attention deficits, sleep disorders, numbness, dizziness, stiffness in joints, irritability, fatigue, weakness, muscle spasms, seizures, depression and inability to sit for long periods of time. These effects are often long-term or permanent.

Many deaths from lightning occur because people wait too long before seeking shelter. If you can hear thunder, lightning is close enough that it could strike your location at any moment, and often strikes as far away as 10 miles from any rainfall. Every flash of lightning is dangerous, even the first, because lightning can travel sideways from the storm. Even when the sky looks clear, be cautious. At least 10 percent of lightning occurs without visible clouds overhead in the sky. Look for dark cloud bases and increasing winds, and head to safety before the first flash of lightning.

The most dangerous place to be in the event of a storm is outside. Seek shelter in a sturdy, closed building that contains a mechanism for conducting the electrical current from the point of contact to the ground. Avoid sheds, picnic shelters, baseball dugouts, bleachers, open carports, garages and covered patios, which are not safe from lightning strikes. If no enclosed building is accessible, get inside a hard-topped, all-metal vehicle.

If you can't get to a sturdy shelter, crouch down low in an open area. Stay at least twice as far away from trees as they are tall. Since water is an excellent conductor of electricity, avoid standing in or near puddles. Also, remember to avoid holding anything that will conduct or attract lightning, such as golf clubs, fishing poles or tennis racquets.

For more information about lightning safety awareness, visit the National Weather Service's web page on lightning safety [here](#).

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