

...Severe Weather Awareness Week in New England and New York...

The National Weather Service, along with all the New England states and the state of New York, have proclaimed this week as Severe Weather Awareness Week. Today, we look at lightning.

Although the number of tornadoes and severe thunderstorms may be low in Vermont and Northern New York, the number of days with thunderstorms ranges from 20 to 30 days. Remember, an "average" thunderstorm contains potentially deadly lightning that can strike the ground.

Lightning strikes the earth many times each second and is a deadly surge of electrical current. Average statistics show that lightning kills more people than hurricanes or tornadoes, responsible for nearly 60 deaths and 500 injuries annually in the United States.

Thunder is the result of a lightning strike and is created when lightning heats up the air around it, up to 50,000 degrees and causes the air to expand and contract rapidly. Because light travels much faster than sound, you hear the thunder after you see the lightning.

Here is how you can determine how close the lightning is. Once you see a flash of lightning, start counting the seconds. When you hear the thunder, stop counting. Divide the number of seconds you counted by five to get the distance of the lightning in miles from your location.

If you plan to be outside, check the latest forecast and keep an eye on the sky. Move inside when thunderstorms are near. Almost all lightning deaths occur outdoors. When inside, keep away from windows, doors and electrical appliances. Stay away from water and do not use the telephone, except in an emergency.

If you are stranded outside, get inside your car. If this is not possible, seek shelter in a low area. Do not stand near a tall tree.

If you are boating, get to safe harbor at once. If swimming get out and away from the water immediately.

Remember, lightning may strike miles from the storm cloud. If you can hear thunder, then you are at risk of a lightning strike and precautions should be taken.

More information on severe weather as well as forecasts and other weather information can be found at www.weather.gov/burlington. Also, visit our NWS Burlington Facebook and Twitter sites for more information.