

NEWS RELEASE: June 21, 2010

### **Heat, lightning and flooding highlighted in Summer Weather Safety Week**

The Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department and the National Weather Service are highlighting summertime weather dangers this week in recognition of Missouri Summer Safety & Lightning Awareness Week, June 21-25. High heat, lightning strikes and flooding are all hazards associated with the summer months, and officials are using this week to remind the public how to stay safe during these potentially dangerous conditions.

“It’s appropriate to be talking about summer weather safety today, because the National Weather Services has just issued our first heat advisory of the season,” said Ryan Nicholls, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management. “We are not strangers to extreme heat and it is important that everyone review over their plans and be ready for several days of extremely hot weather.”

Prolonged exposure to high heat, combined with humidity, can test the body’s ability to keep itself cool. Young children, the elderly and chronically ill people are particularly susceptible to becoming overheated and developing heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Last year, there were 763 emergency room visits related to heat in Missouri and 11 Missourians died from heat-related disorders.

The National Weather Service has criteria for the issuance of heat advisories and warnings. The NWS will issue advisories when the heat index — a combination of heat and humidity — reaches 105 degrees. A warning will be issued when advisory criteria is expected to reach advisory levels for four straight days, or when the heat index climbs to 110 degrees and the overnight heat index fails to drop below 75 degrees.

- To help keep cool during high heat, follow these tips:
- Dress in lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Drink plenty of fluids, particularly, water even if you don’t feel thirsty. Avoid beverages containing alcohol and caffeine, which can dehydrate your body.
- Avoid strenuous activities, if possible, especially during the sun’s peak hours – 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Never leave children, seniors or pets in a parked car. The interior temperature can rise quickly.
- Stay out of the sun as much as possible. When in the sun, wear sunscreen and a hat.
- Take frequent breaks when working or playing outside. Find a cool place to rest for a few minutes.
- Use a buddy system in high heat-stress jobs and activities; this can help ensure that signs of heat stress do not go unnoticed.

- Plan your day so you can spend some time in air-conditioned places, like libraries, senior centers, shopping centers, movie theaters, and, if available, public cooling centers if your home is not air-conditioned.
- Check on your neighbors, friends, and family, especially seniors and people with special needs.
- Provide plenty of fresh water for outside pets and access to shaded areas. Eat frequent, small meals and avoid high-protein foods.
- Avoid salt tablets, unless prescribed by a physician.
- Avoid relying on fans when temperatures exceed 90, as they may overheat you instead of cool you down.

Summer is the peak season for cloud-to-ground lightning strikes, which killed 34 Americans last year, two of which were in Missouri. Summer storms often cause flash flooding, a hazard Greene County residents are already familiar with this year.

“All the recent thunderstorms should easily raise awareness of the real hazards of lightning and flooding,” said Nicholls.

Lightning can strike up to 10 miles away from where it’s raining, so if you hear thunder, you are within striking range. To stay safe during lightning conditions, the National Weather Service encourages people to remember the phrase, “When thunder roars, go indoors,” and to follow these tips:

- Go inside a fully enclosed building, one with wiring and plumbing, which will ground electricity from a lightning strike. Pavilions, golf shelters, dugouts, tents, sheds and other small structures are not safe.
- If you can’t get inside, get into a hard-topped vehicle and close the doors and windows.
- If you are caught outside, do not seek shelter under trees and stay away from metal objects, like fences, utility poles, golf clubs, bicycles and motorcycles, even backpack frames. Find a ditch or low spot and crouch down on the balls of your feet.
- Do not use showers, tubs, sinks, or wired telephones during a lightning storm. Stay away from electronic equipment.

The most common hazard of flash flooding is driving into low-water road crossings, although pedestrians may also be easily knocked off their feet by rushing flood water. When approaching roadways under water, the phrase to remember is “Turn around, don’t drown.” Also follow these tips:

- Listen to a Weather Radio, or a credible news source, for flash flood watches and

warnings.

- If flooding occurs, get to higher ground. Get out of areas subject to flooding.
- Avoid areas already flooded, especially if the water is flowing fast. Do not attempt to cross flowing streams.
- Roads may be washed out under floodwater. Never drive through flooded roadways. If your vehicle is suddenly caught in rising water, leave it immediately and seek higher ground.
- Never allow children to wade in or play around flooded creeks, rivers, culverts and stormwater drains.
- Do not camp or park your vehicle along streams and washes, particularly during threatening conditions.
- Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize flood dangers.

“Despite repeated warnings to ‘turn around, don’t drown,’ we continue to conduct multiple water rescues during flooding events, primarily due to folks driving across flooded roadways,” said Nicholls. “Rising water and lightning strikes can be deadly and need to always be taken seriously.”

For more information about summer weather hazards, visit these websites:

- National Weather Service, Springfield office, at [www.crh.noaa.gov/sgf/](http://www.crh.noaa.gov/sgf/)
- Springfield-Greene County Health Department, at <http://www.springfieldmo.gov/health>
- Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management, at [www.greenecountyoem.org](http://www.greenecountyoem.org)

For additional information on heat hazards, call Karen McKinnis, Environmental/Community Health Planner with the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, at 864-1623. For additional information on lightning and flash flooding, call Ryan Nicholls, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management, at 869-6040; or Steve Runnels, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the National Weather Service, at 863-1456, ext. 726.

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