

NEWS RELEASE: June 24, 2011

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 the hazards of high heat, ultraviolet rays, lightning and flooding in recognition of Summer Weather Safety Week, June 19-25.

“It’s appropriate to be talking about summer weather safety with weather we’ve already experienced this season and next week’s forecast of temps in the 90s,” said Ryan Nicholls, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management. “We are not strangers to extreme heat, lightning or flooding, and it’s important to review how to stay safe.”

Prolonged exposure to high heat, combined with humidity, can test the body’s ability to keep itself cool. Young children, elderly and chronically ill people are particularly susceptible to becoming overheated and developing heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Last year, 17 Missourians died from heat-related disorders.

The National Weather Service issues 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 avoid heat-related illness in high heat, follow these tips:

- Dress in lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. When in the sun, wear sunscreen and a hat.
- 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 outdoor activities, if possible, especially during the sun’s peak hours – 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Take frequent breaks in the shade.
- Use a buddy system in high heat-stress jobs and activities; this can help ensure that signs of heat stress do not go unnoticed.
- Never leave children, seniors or pets in a parked car. The interior temperature can rise quickly.
- 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.
- Check on your neighbors, friends, and family and pets.
- Provide plenty of fresh water for outside pets and access to shaded areas.
- 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 29 Americans last year. In 2011, there have been six lightning-related deaths already, including Riverside Officer Jeff Taylor, who was assisting in the Joplin tornado response.

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.

Flooding has already impacted much of Missouri this year. The most common flooding hazard is driving into low-water road crossings, although pedestrians may also be easily knocked off their feet by rushing floodwater.

"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, who advises these tips:

- 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, and even a few inches of rushing water can stall a vehicle or carry it downstream.
- 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's harder to recognize flood dangers. Listen to a Weather Radio, or a credible news source, for flash flood watches and warnings.

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

- National Weather Service, Springfield office, at www.crh.noaa.gov/sgf/
- Springfield-Greene County Health Department, at <http://www.springfieldmo.gov/health>

For additional information on heat hazards, call Karen McKinnis, Environmental/Community Health Planner with the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, at 417-864-1623. For additional information on lightning and flash flooding, call Ryan Nicholls, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management, at 417-869-6040; or Steve Runnels, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the National Weather Service, at 417-863-1456, ext. 726.

###