

Facts and Falsehoods About Lightning

(MS) — Mother Nature offers many wonders that are a spectacle to behold. Ranking among some of the more awe-inspiring is lightning. Lightning strikes the earth roughly 1,800 times at any given moment.

While lightning is certainly a beautiful vision illuminating the sky, its immense power can have a downside, including the potential for destruction and even death. Lightning is five times as hot as the sun in every one-inch diameter bolt. In the U.S., lightning kills more people than hurricanes and tornadoes, combined. Only floods are more deadly. According to Underwriters Laboratories, lightning also accounts for more than one billion dollars annually in structural damage to buildings in the U.S.

Considering lightning inspires awe and wonder, and also some fear ... it is beneficial to separate fact from fiction when it comes to lightning safety.

1. People are poor lightning conductors.

Fiction: The human body is a better conductor than insulating building materials, water, and many metallic systems. The body is over 90 percent fluid, which is why sticking a finger in an electric socket or even experiencing static electricity when touching a doorknob can shock you.

2. If you are caught outdoors, it can be safe to seek shelter from lightning in a car.

Fact: A vehicle that is fully-enclosed with metal can provide better protection against lightning than standing outdoors in a storm.

3. Lightning rods attract lightning.

Fiction: A lightning protection system simply intercepts a lightning strike and provides a safe path to ground for discharging the dangerous electricity.

4. Surge arresters, suppressors and “whole-house protectors” can protect my home.

Fiction: Surge protection devices are important components of a complete system to protect incoming utility lines against infiltration, but can do nothing to protect a structure against direct lightning strikes. Surge protection must be installed in conjunction with a structural lightning rod system (air terminals, bonding and grounding) to provide whole house protection.

5. Insurance covers all damages caused by lightning.

Fact & Fiction: While this is generally true for an initial occurrence with lightning, many insurance companies will



Avoid lightning losses this season. A professionally installed lightning protection system can protect your home and business from lightning's destructive power.

deny second or third lightning claims and many will non-renew a policy after a lightning claim is entered.

Since a single bolt of lightning can carry over 100 million volts of electricity (enough power to rip through a roof, explode walls of brick and concrete and ignite fires), homeowners may want to consider the security and peace of mind that a lightning protection system offers. A professionally installed lightning protection system provides a safe path to channel lightning's electrical energy into the earth. The Lightning Protection Institute (LPI), a not-for-profit nationwide group founded in 1955 to promote lightning safety, awareness and education, stresses that homeowners should only use experienced contractors to install protection systems. LPI states that the contractor should be reputable, use UL-listed materials and be LPI-certified in lightning protection.

“It is important to have an experienced professional install the lightning protection system,” says Bud VanSickle, executive director for LPI. “Contacting a certified professional ensures safety and expertise to save consumers time and money.”

The Lightning Protection Institute offers a list of certified contractors, along with information regarding the national safety standards for lightning protection installation. Visit the LPI Web site at www.lightning.org for more information.

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