Spot The Safety Violation: Don’t Take Lightning Lightly



Do these workers seem sufficiently concerned about the electrical storm brewing near them’

June 8-14, 2015 is Lightning Safety Week in Canada. It’s the appropriate time to address this issue because thunderstorms are common during the summer. And the lightning that comes with them poses a serious safety risk to workers, especially those who work outside.

These workers in Australia were determined to finished pouring a concrete slab at the Fraser Coast Cultural Centre while the site was in the midst of a roaring electrical storm. In fact, the power at the site went out in the middle of the storm, but that didn’t stop them.

I suppose the workers could be commended for their dedication to the job. But by working at such an exposed site’and one with tall, metal objects that actually attract lightning’the workers were in serious danger of being struck by lightning. So the safer course would’ve been to delay the work until the storm had passed.

According to Environment Canada, each year, lightning kills about 10 Canadians and injures approximately 100-150 others. But if you doubt that lightning poses a serious workplace safety risk, consider these incidents:

- Jan. 2015, two constructions workers in Perth, Australia

were injured by an electrical arc when lightning struck near the boom of a crane.
- In June 2013, a Florida construction worker was struck by lightning and killed as he climbed down scaffolding.
- In July 2013, lightning struck nine farm workers in Colorado, knocking several of them unconscious and leaving two in critical condition.
- In Aug. 2013, two railroad workers in Manitoba were sent to the hospital after lightning struck the tracks where they were working.
- In New Brunswick, eight workers received electric shocks when the steel structure they were working on was hit by lightning.

If your workers work outside, you can help protect them by using the Canada Lightning Danger Map from Environment Canada to see the areas at greatest risk of being struck by lightning in the next 10 minutes.

LIGHTNING SAFETY TIPS FOR WORKERS

If you can hear thunder, you're within striking distance of lightning. And remember'there's no safe place outdoors during a thunderstorm. So take shelter immediately, preferably in a building or all-metal automobile (not a convertible). And once in a safe location, stay there for 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder is heard before going outside again.

If you're caught **outdoors**:

- Avoid putting yourself above the surrounding landscape. Seek shelter in low-lying areas, such as valleys, ditches and depressions'but be aware of flooding.
- Stay away from water. Don't go boating if a storm threatens and get to land as quickly as possible if you're already on the water. Lightning can strike the water and travel a substantial distance from its point of contact.

- Stay away from objects that conduct electricity, such as tractors, golf carts, golf clubs, metal fences, motorcycles, lawnmowers and bicycles.
- Stay away from tall objects, such as trees, poles, wires and fences.
- Avoid being the highest point in an open area. Holding an item such as an umbrella can make you the tallest object and thus a target for lightning.
- In a forest, seek shelter in a low-lying area under a thick growth of small trees or bushes.
- You're safe inside a car during a lightning storm. But don't park under tall objects that could topple onto the car and don't get out if there are downed power lines nearby.

If you're **inside** during a thunderstorm:

- Before the storm hits, disconnect electrical appliances.
- Don't handle electrical equipment or telephones. The electrical current from a lightning strike will travel through wires and cords and if you're directly connected with them, you could be struck. Cordless telephones are safe to use, although you could hear a very loud noise on the phone if the building or somewhere nearby is struck by lightning.
- Don't go outside unless absolutely necessary.
- Keep as many walls as possible between you and the outside.

Remember that people who've been struck by lightning *don't* carry an electrical charge and can safely be handled. In fact, they should get medical attention immediately.

So if a co-worker is struck by lightning, call for medical assistance immediately and administer mouth-to-mouth or cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), if necessary.