

Spot The Safety Violation: Don't Wait for Lightning to Strike Twice



Are these workers effectively protecting themselves from getting hit by lightning? What should they be doing?



Thunderstorms are common during the summer. And the lightning that comes with them poses a serious safety risk to workers, especially those who work outdoors.

The Hong Kong dock workers in this picture weren't actually working at the time (they were on strike). Nonetheless, whatever they're holding above their heads may protect them from the rain to some extent but provides no protection at all

from lightning. To make matters worse, the workers are surrounded by tall, metal objects that actually attract lightning.

According to Environment Canada, each year, lightning kills about 10 Canadians and injures approximately 100-150 others. But if you don't think lightning is a real workplace safety risk, consider these incidents:

- 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.

LIGHTNING SAFETY TIPS

The most important lightning safety tip: get inside! There's no safe place outdoors during a thunderstorm. So take shelter immediately, preferably in a building or vehicle.

In a building, stay away from electrical appliances and equipment, doors, windows and anything else that will conduct electricity, such as sinks. Also, avoid using a telephone that's connected to a landline.

If you're in a vehicle during lightning, don't park under tall objects, such as trees, that could topple and don't get out if there are downed power lines nearby.

Once in a safe location, remain there for 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder is heard before resuming your outdoor activities.

If you *are* caught outside far from a safe shelter:

- **Avoid putting yourself above the surrounding landscape.** Seek shelter in low-lying areas such as valleys, ditches and depressions'but stay **alert for flash floods**.
- **Stay away from tall objects**, such as trees, poles, wires and fences, as well as open water.
- **Stay away from anything metal or that conducts electricity**, such as tractors, cranes, scaffolding, metal fences, etc.
- **Avoid being the highest point in an open area.** Holding up an umbrella can make you the tallest object and a target for lightning.
- **In a forest**, seek shelter in a low-lying area under a thick growth of small trees or bushes.

Remember that people who've been struck by lightning *don't* carry an electrical charge and can be safely 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.

For more information on protecting workers from lightning, check out this resource:

- A video from Environment Canada on lightning safety

You can also use 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.