

Lightning Safety While RVing, Camping, or Off-Roading

www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change
(with minor modifications)

Campers, Travel Trailers, or RV's

Avoid setting up your camper, travel trailer, or recreational vehicle (RV) under an isolated tree or the tallest tree, close to a metal fence, or on a hilltop.

If thunder is heard, lightning is within striking distance. Find a safe location immediately, either in a building with plumbing and wiring or an all-metal automobile (not one with a convertible top).

Lightning will travel around the outside surface of a metal-framed vehicle, protecting the vehicle's passengers from the electrical shock. This is called the Faraday Cage effect. If the passenger does not make contact with the outer metal shell (i.e., by touching internal parts such as the steering wheel, radio knob, or door handle), s/he will be safe.

Unsafe vehicles include:

1. Pop-up campers with sides of fabric-like material.
2. RVs made out of fiberglass. A lightning strike will go right through the unit.

(**Note:** An RV with a skeletal steel or aluminum structure is okay.)

RV Safety Actions:

1. If you are connected to shore power, disconnect from the post and stow your power cord away. DON'T leave it on the ground! And DON'T just turn the breaker at the post "off."
2. Retract all leveling jacks and/or stabilizers. If you are in a travel trailer or 5th wheel, reconnect it to your vehicle and raise the tongue jack or landing gear.
3. If you have a crank-up TV antenna, crank it down.
4. If you are connected to cable TV or a satellite antenna, disconnect it from your RV.
5. If caught outside, far from a safe location, stay away from tall objects like trees, poles, wires, and fences. Take shelter in a low-lying area.

Tent Camping/Off-Roading

A safe location, such as a building with wiring and plumbing or a vehicle, would be hard to find in the backcountry. The following are some suggestions to help reduce the risks of being hit by lightning while boondocking. Mountainous terrain or windy conditions can often reduce the distance that thunder can be heard. Plan ahead, watch the skies for developing thunderstorms, and get to safer terrain to minimize the risks of being struck by lightning.

The following are some suggestions to help reduce the risks of being hit by lightning while Tent Camping or Off-Roading. However, there is no safe place outside during a thunderstorm.

1. Watch the weather and know when storms develop locally.
2. Plan to avoid high-risk areas such as peaks, ridges, and higher terrain before a thunderstorm arrives.
3. Quickly move to lower ground if you hear thunder while climbing an exposed mountain or ridge.
4. Avoid open areas that are 100 yards (or meters/metres) wide or wider.
5. Look for a dry ravine or depression before a storm hits and spread out to reduce multiple injuries. Be very aware of the possibility of flash flooding!
6. Avoid trees with large trunks if lightning strikes close by.



Remains of a shattered pine tree hit by lightning.

Photo courtesy of National Lightning Safety Institute

General Rules for Everyone

1. Stay in a safe location for 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder. About one-third of casualties occur after the storm because people return to outdoor activities too soon.
2. No place outside is safe in a thunderstorm, so remember:

When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors!