

## Lightning and Wildfire Preparedness Week June 18-24, 2006

### Lightning Facts & Tips

- Here in Colorado, lightning is the number one life threatening weather hazard. Between 1959 and 1994, lightning killed 394 people. Colorado ranks number 11 for lightning deaths in the United States.

Lightning is the most dangerous and frequently encountered weather hazard people experience each year.

- Most victims are struck while playing golf or field sports and while in or near water. Even if a storm is several miles away, you can still be struck.
- Lightning is the **number-one** cause of storm-related deaths.
- During 2003, 6 people were killed and 12 injured in Colorado by lightning.

### Lightning Safety Tips:

- If you feel your hair stand on end, drop to the ground in a crouched position, hands on knees.  
Do not lie flat on the ground.
- Avoid being the highest object in any area.
- Avoid hilltops, trees or telephone poles. In a forest, move under a growth of small trees.
- Stay away from water during a thunderstorm. Water conducts electricity.
- Get off or away from open water and metal equipment (golf cars, tractors, bicycles). Drop golf clubs and remove golf shoes. Keep several yards away from other people. In open areas, go to a low place like a ravine or valley.
- Stay indoors and away from windows during a storm.
- Inside a home, avoid using the phone and unplug unnecessary appliances.
- Watch for flash flooding.
- Many people apparently "killed" by lightning can be revived if quick action is taken.
- Learn mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and CPR. First aid given should be given to those not breathing within a few minutes.
- If you're affected by a lightning strike, see a physician immediately.

## Wildfire Awareness Information

2002 was the worst wildfire season in Colorado's history.

- Over 4,500 wildfires burned more than 600,000.
- Three hundred and eighty homes and 624 outbuildings were lost and more than 80,000 people were evacuated.
- It cost \$306 million to fight and recover from the fires.
  
- Nine firefighters lost their lives.
  
- An average of 1.2 million acres of U.S. woodland burn every year.
  
- More than four out of every five wildfires are caused by people. Although many fires start as a result of lightning strikes, many of the 2002 fires were needlessly caused by people.

Weather conditions can directly contribute to the occurrence of wildfires such as through **lightning** strikes or indirectly such as by an extended dry spell or **drought** that contributes to the availability of fuel.

### Ecosystem relationships

We live in fire ecosystems where fire *will* occur. Many fire effects are not only beneficial, they are necessary and natural for ecosystem health.

Individuals living within the wildland/urban interface can take steps to reduce the risk of fire losses. For example, you can create a Safety Zone around your home or business by doing the following:

- Stack firewood at least 100 feet away and uphill from your home.
- Clear combustible material within 20 feet.
- Mow grass regularly.
- Rake leaves, dead limbs and twigs. Clear all flammable vegetation.
- Remove leaves and rubbish from under structures.
- Thin a 15-foot space between tree crowns, and remove limbs within 15 feet of the ground.
- Remove vines from the walls of the home.
- Remove dead branches that extend over the roof.
- Prune tree branches and shrubs within 15 feet of a stovepipe or chimney outlet.
- Ask the power company to clear branches from power lines.

### What do I do?

- Be aware of fire risks and take responsibility for your use of fire.
  - Be careful with smokes and campfires - only build fires in rings or grates.
  - Use self-contained cookers or chemical stoves.
  - Keep hot mufflers and catalytic converters clear of grasses and shrubs.
  - Burn debris with care.

- If you see smoke or a fire, call 911. They will notify the correct agencies.
- Think about where you would go to flee a fire, what you would take, how you would get out, and an alternate route out in case the one you're planning on is blocked--it's the same kind of planning you do with your family for escaping a fire in your home.
- Know your personal limitations. Don't put yourself or others at risk.

### **How can I help? What can my community do?**

- Be informed about defensible space and how it can minimize fire danger around your property.
- Be aware of approaches your community may wish to take in adopting fire smart covenants, ordinances, and transportation plans.
- Be a part of volunteer or rural fire department training.

### **How we fight wildfires - interagency cooperation**

Wildfires are fought by a diverse group of firefighters and support personnel from more than 20 local, state, and federal agencies. It's the best example of seamless government we know. The goal is to mitigate unwanted fire and provide public safety

Wildfires are not "put out" in the sense that a house fire is extinguished. Firefighters surround wildfires within defensible boundaries. Fire line (constructed by hand, by bulldozer, and by retardant drops, or extended to existing trails or roads) and natural features (streams, lakes, rock outcrops, ridgelines, and already burned areas) are connected to surround the fire. Once the main fire is surrounded, firefighters mop-up remaining hotspots and the fire line to achieve control over the fire.

### **Fire behavior/suppression tactics:**

Trying to stop a raging wildfire - even with the array of available technological and personnel resources -- is like trying to stop a tornado.

Air tankers don't put wildfires out; they provide temporary fire line and can help cool fuels.