

SAFETY TIPS

Safety should be first and foremost on the mind of a spotter. The NWS values your safety more than we do your observations. It is essential that spotters proceed into the field armed not only with knowledge of the storms, but also with an understanding of the dangers posed by thunderstorms.

When spotting, travel in pairs if at all possible. This will allow the driver to remain focused on the chore of driving while the passenger keeps an eye on the sky and handles any communication with the dispatcher. When stopped, two sets of eyes are available for observation.

Keep aware of the local environment at all times:

- When in the vicinity of a thunderstorm keep a two-mile buffer zone between you and the storm.
- Frequently check the sky overhead and behind to ensure no unexpected events (such as a new tornado) are developing.
- Always have an escape route available, in case threatening weather approaches or if you get within the two-mile buffer zone.

Lightning is the number one killer among weather phenomena. During a typical year, lightning kills more people than hurricanes, tornadoes, and winter storms combined. The two main threats posed by lightning are the intense heat of the lightning stroke (about 15,000 degrees Celsius) and the extreme current associated with the stroke, estimated at 30,000 amperes (less than 1 ampere can be fatal).

Lightning is also the biggest weather hazard facing the spotter. When in the field, the spotter will *usually* be in a preferred lightning strike area (in the open, on a hilltop, etc.). Whenever possible, remain in your spotting vehicle to minimize chances of being struck by lightning. If you must leave your vehicle, crouch as low as possible to make yourself a less-favorable target.