

# Safety Tips #27

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## Adverse Conditions: Lightning

Last month we discussed dealing with riding in hot weather. This month let's discuss riding and the issue of lightning. Many of us have heard that one of the safest places to be when lightning strikes is in a car. That may be so, but we are not safe on a motorcycle! I recently read that, on the average, 60 people are killed each year, and 300 injured, by lightning in the United States. And guess which are the four most dangerous states: Florida, Utah, Wyoming, and.... you guessed it: COLORADO. In *Proficient Motorcycling* author David Hough has this to say, "If you feel a tingling on your skin or your hair stands up or the time between flash and boom is less than ten seconds, lightning could strike in your vicinity at any moment." "Your best chance of not getting struck is to get away from metal objects, get away from tall structures such as trees or power poles, and get inside some sturdy building or inside an enclosed vehicle. Avoid hilltops or continuing uphill into a thundershower. If you have no other choice, get off the bike and go into a low ravine. Do not sit on the ground, but squat low on the balls of your feet to minimize ground contact."

I found this on the website of the National Weather Service:

**“Remember, there is NO safe place outside in a thunderstorm. If you absolutely can't get to safety, this**

**section may help you slightly lessen the threat of being struck by lightning while outside. Don't kid yourself--you are NOT safe outside.**

Being stranded outdoors when lightning is striking nearby is a harrowing experience. Your first and only truly safe choice is to get to a safe building or vehicle. If you are [camping](#), [climbing](#), on a [motorcycle or bicycle](#), [boating](#), [scuba diving](#), or enjoying other outdoor activities and cannot get to a safe vehicle or building, follow these **last resort** tips. They will *not* prevent you from being struck by lightning, but may *slightly* lessen the odds.

- Know the weather patterns of the area. For example, in mountainous areas, thunderstorms typically develop in the early afternoon, so plan to hike early in the day and be down the mountain by noon.
- Listen to the weather forecast for the outdoor area you plan to visit. The forecast may be very different from the one near your home. If there is a high chance of thunderstorms, stay home.

These actions may *slightly* reduce your risk of being struck by lightning:

- If camping, hiking, etc., far from a safe vehicle or building, avoid open fields, the top of a hill or a ridge top.
- Stay away from tall, isolated trees or other tall objects. If you are in a forest, stay near a lower stand of trees.
- If you are camping in an open area, set up camp in a valley, ravine or other low area. Remember, a tent offers NO protection from lightning.
- Stay away from water, wet items (such as ropes) and metal objects (such as fences and poles). Water and

metal are excellent conductors of electricity. The current from a lightning flash will easily travel for long distances.”

So the threat of being injured or killed while riding a bike in an electrical storm is very real. Of course the best thing to do is to avoid the situation entirely, if possible. If it's not possible, follow the suggestions given above by Mr. Hough and by the National Weather Service, and stay safe to enjoy riding in the future.