

Week of June 7, 2010



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Have a Safe Summer

Though the weather in our state is so unpredictable that many joke if you don't like it, wait five minutes and it will change, we know extreme heat and humidity are common fixtures of Missouri summers. As the warmest days approach—and the occasional severe storm—I thought it would be beneficial to pass along some tips that will help keep you and your family safe and cool during Missouri's sweltering summer months.

June 20–26 is [Missouri Summer Weather Safety Week](#), which is a coordinated effort among the National Weather Service, Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and State Emergency Management Agency to educate Missourians about excessive heat safety and hazardous summer weather.

On average, excessive heat kills more people each year in the U.S. than any other weather threats, including floods, cold and hurricanes, according to the National Weather Service. Heat and humidity are primarily hazardous to small children, the elderly and the chronically ill. However, health officials warn that high temperatures and humidity levels can also take their toll on young, healthy people. Between 1980 and 2008, more than 900 people died from heat-related causes in Missouri, and in 2009, there were more than 750 emergency room visits related to heat.

As temperatures and humidity increase, Missourians need to be cautious about heat-related illness. The best preventive measure is seeking out a place that has air conditioning. The elderly and chronically ill are often more susceptible because they perspire less and are more likely to be taking medications that can impair the body's response to heat. People should check with their doctor or pharmacist to find out if their medications make them more sensitive to heat.

Children are also vulnerable to heat. They need to drink plenty of fluids during hot weather. Infants and young children should never be left unattended in hot environments, especially cars, even if the air conditioner is running. A car's interior only takes a few minutes to reach oven-like temperatures, putting anyone left inside at risk of overheating.

Some of the warning signs of heat-related illness include heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness or weakness, dizziness, headache and nausea. If you start to

experience any of these symptoms, rest in a cool, air-conditioned area, if possible, and drink plenty of water. For more information about heat-related illnesses, visit www.dhss.mo.gov/Hyperthermia/HeatPrecautions.html.

Lightning is another concern as we enter the season of severe weather. Though deaths and injuries from lightning are rare (Missouri averages about two deaths per year), they may actually be underreported because lightning does not cause the mass destruction left behind by most tornadoes and hurricanes, which generally receive more attention. Statistics show that the 30-year average for lightning fatalities across the country is 61 per year, but it's estimated that 100 to 120 deaths per year occur because of lightning. Likewise, approximately 300 lightning injuries are documented each year, but the actual total may be much higher.

Regardless, with one lightning stroke generating somewhere between 100 million and 1 billion volts of electricity, it's important to take precautions during a storm. Lightning can strike as much as 10 miles away from the rain area of a thunderstorm, which leaves many people vulnerable to being struck by lightning as thunderstorms are in the vicinity. Although it's possible for a victim to be struck by lightning directly, typically it happens as the current moves in and along the ground. Most of these lightning incidents occur in open areas and high elevations (such as on a sports field or golf course), while about a quarter occur under trees and another 14 percent happen in the water.

Avoiding lightning incidents is as simple as heading inside a completely enclosed building before a storm arrives. Do not take shelter under a tree, and avoid being the tallest object in the area. Also, get away from water and stop using any metal objects such as golf clubs. Indoors, do not use electrical appliances during a storm, stay away from doors, windows and metal pipes, and most importantly, do not use a telephone unless it is an emergency. Landline telephone use is the leading cause of indoor lightning injuries in the U.S.

Summer is one of the best times of the year, and many Missourians will spend a significant amount of time outside. Just by taking a few extra precautions during extreme heat or severe weather, it will be a great, safe Missouri summer for you and your family.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact my office with your questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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