

Lightning strikes can cause serious injuries or death when workers are outdoors during thunderstorms. While lightning is often overlooked as an occupational hazard, awareness about lightning hazards is critical to ensure workers' safety.

Lightning is a dangerous natural force. According to OSHA, in the United States, over 300 people are struck by lightning every year and unfortunately many of those people die from their injuries.

FATAL LIGHTNING STRIKE INCIDENT



A landscaping crew consisting of three workers was manually moving pallets of rocks from the bed of a dump truck into a front-end loader, which was positioned at the back of the truck. The dump truck driver was standing on the ground beside the loader. There was a lightning strike that injured all three workers on the dump truck and threw the driver more than 10 feet from the work area. One of the workers died from his injuries days later.

On the day of the incident, the weather conditions were wet and rainy with approaching thunderstorms. Light rain had been falling, and a severe storm had moved through earlier in the morning. The ground surface, dump truck, front-end loader, and workers were all wet from the rainy conditions. The workers were the highest objects in the area and were surrounded by a metal dump truck, making them targets for the lightning strike.

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- People are most commonly struck by lightning at the beginning or ending of a thunderstorm, outside of heavy rain, and in smaller storms, when they have a false sense of security and tend to take more chances.
- Many lightning victims are caught outside during a storm because they did not act promptly to get to a safe place, or they go back outside too soon after a storm has passed.
- If there are signs of an approaching thunderstorm, workers should not begin any task that they cannot quickly stop if they need to get to safety.
- If you hear thunder when working outdoors, even a distant rumble, get to a safe place immediately.
- A competent person should evaluate the site before work begins and throughout the workday to ensure a safe working environment that is free of hazards, including dangerous weather.

Discussion

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What factors increase lightning strike risk?

What should you do if you need to take cover during a thunderstorm?