

Alexandria CERT: Community Emergency Response Team

Police – Fire – Medical Emergency	911
Alexandria Non-Emergency	703-746-4444
Alexandria Animal Control	703-746-4774
National Poison Control Center	800-222-1222
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	800-273-8255

March - April 2021

Lightning Safety

Each year in the United States, approximately 20 people die and over 160 are injured after being hit by lightning. Survivors can experience short- or long-term intense pain, neurological disabilities, depression, and other health problems. Most deaths happen in July or August, and Wednesdays are when most deaths occur. Men are three times more likely to be killed than women. The age groups most at risk are 30-69. **First Aid for Victims.** Call 911 immediately. Cardiac arrest is the immediate injury, so start CPR. Send someone for an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED), if one is nearby. If possible, move to a safer place, such as indoors.

General Advice. Postpone outdoor activities if thunderstorms are forecast. If you will be outdoors, plan where to go for safety and ensure you will have enough time to get there. Look for storm signs: towering clouds, darkening skies, sound of thunder, or lightning. Don't wait too long to get to shelter.

Go to a Safe Place. If you hear thunder, move to a building with plumbing or electricity (not a shed or tent) or to an enclosed, metal-topped vehicle with windows up (not a golf cart). In a vehicle, don't touch the ignition or other electrical components such as the radio. Stay inside for at least 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder.

If You Are Outside. Get off elevated areas such as hills. Avoid open areas. Never lie flat on the ground. Stay away from tall objects such as trees and objects that conduct electricity such as wire fences – electrical charges can travel 25 feet or more through the ground. Get out of and away from ponds, lakes, or rivers; water conducts electricity. Spread out if you are with a group of people, to prevent mass casualties.

Indoor Safety. Don't use corded phones, computers, or other electrical equipment or appliances that put you in contact with electricity. Avoid plumbing: Don't take a bath or shower, or wash your hands. Stay away from windows and doors and stay off porches or balconies. Do not sit on concrete floors or lean against concrete walls.

Weather.gov. Visit this National Weather Service website to learn about:

- SkyWarn® - volunteer as a storm spotter.
- StormReady and Weather Ready Nation – programs to prepare your community for severe storms and climate events.

About Lightning

Thunder and lightning can occur during spring and summer storms. Lightning can also appear during heavy snowstorms or large hurricanes. Thunder is the warning of danger. The extreme heat of a lightning bolt creates an acoustic shock wave.

The base of a moving thunderstorm may develop a huge negative charge, while positively charged particles follow the storm along the ground. When the difference between the negative and positive charges is great enough, positively charged particles may collect in and rise up taller objects such as trees or buildings. Meanwhile, negative charges descend from the bottom of the storm. Then, the positive charge streams up to connect with the negative charge, resulting in a bolt of lightning. Often the bolt does not use all the charge, and additional cloud-to-ground lightning strikes will occur.

Sometimes the process is reversed: positive charges are at the top of the storm cloud, and negative charges are at the ground. These lightning bolts are 10 times stronger and can strike up to 25 miles away. It may not even be storming where lightning strikes.

Fire Extinguishers

Safety First. Safety is your first consideration if there is a fire and/or smoke: How can you escape quickly? Fires grow and spread rapidly, and smoke may be toxic or dense. Make sure the fire department has been called or is being called and others are exiting the building.

A portable fire extinguisher is a very limited tool. Use a fire extinguisher only to put out small fires that are confined and not spreading. Small means no larger than a wastebasket. Pay attention to the fire and also be aware of what's behind you, above you, to the left or right, in case the fire has sparked another outbreak.

If you can't put out the fire in less than 30 seconds, leave!

P.A.S.S. To operate a fire extinguisher, remember this word.

- Pull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you, and release the locking mechanism.
- Aim low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.
- Squeeze the lever slowly and evenly.
- Sweep the nozzle from side-to-side.

Contact the fire department or your nearest fire station for training or if you have questions.

Choosing a Fire Extinguisher. The three main criteria are: 1) it carries the label of an independent testing laboratory such as UL (Underwriters Laboratories); 2) its size – large enough to put out a small fire but not so heavy as to be difficult to handle; and 3) the type of extinguisher. A multi-purpose fire extinguisher is best for home use. These types of fire extinguishers are labeled A-B-C or B-C, referring to the types of fires they are designed to put out.

- A: ordinary materials that create ash like cloth, wood, or paper.
- B: combustible and flammable liquids like cooking oil, grease, gasoline, oil, oil-based paints, or paint thinner.
- C: electrical equipment that is plugged in like appliances, tools, TVs, or computers.

Two other types of fire extinguishers are for commercial use. These are labeled D for flammable metals used in factories and K for oils and fats in commercial kitchens like restaurants or cafeterias.

Installing Fire Extinguishers. Have a fire extinguisher in the kitchen. Kitchen fires are the most common type of home fires. Place other fire extinguishers in areas with hazardous materials or that could be the scene of a fire. For example, the garage or basement, or a den with a fireplace. Install it close to an exit (on your escape route) and make sure nothing blocks or limits the ability to reach the fire extinguisher.

Replacing Fire Extinguishers. Here are some recommendations:

- Replace fire extinguishers every 10-12 years.
- Monitor the pressure gauge. If it is too low, replace it.
- Get a new fire extinguisher after you use it, even if you didn't use all the contents.
- Replace it if the nozzle or hose is ripped, cracked, or clogged, if the handle is wobbly or broken, or if the shell is damaged or cracked.

Vehicle Fires

About 14% of fires are vehicle fires.

Type B-C fire extinguishers should be used for vehicle fires. Type B-C extinguishers are also used for boats and are approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Do's and Don'ts. Get out of and away from the vehicle. Make sure others get out, too. If the vehicle is in a garage, leave immediately. If it's an attached garage, exit your home, too. Call 911 from a safe distance. Do not attempt to get personal property from the vehicle.

Use a fire extinguisher from at least 6 feet away and make sure you have an escape route. Do not open the hood or trunk to fight the fire. Air could rush in, further spreading the fire. The most serious dangers from a vehicle fire are toxic gases and other hazardous substances, along with flying debris and explosions.

Alternative Fuel and Hybrid Vehicle Fires. Never approach an alternative fuel or hybrid vehicle on fire. Just call 911. Alternative fuel vehicles run on batteries, fuel cells, hydrogen, natural gas (like many buses now), or propane. Hybrids also have an internal combustion engine.

Fires in these vehicles may release flammable or explosive vapor. If their fuel is based on ethanol or methanol, they burn with a bright blue flame that is difficult to see in daylight or bright lighting. Some vehicles have high-voltage wires, which can deliver a severe electrical shock.