

TOOLBOX TALK: LIGHTNING AND SEVERE WEATHER

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Look up. Now look at the crane, the scaffold and the roof. If a storm arrives in twenty minutes, who is furthest from the ground and how long does it take to get them down?

The talk

There is no OSHA standard for lightning. What there is is the General Duty Clause and a joint OSHA and NOAA fact sheet, which is the guidance everybody uses and which says one thing above all: when thunder roars, go indoors.

Any thunder you can hear was made by lightning, and the distance does not make you safe. Strikes reach well outside the rain. People are regularly hit under blue sky at the edge of a storm.

So the trigger is sound, not sight, and it is not negotiable. First thunder means work stops and people come down. Cranes, scaffolds, roofs, lifts and ladders are the first things off, not the last.

Shelter is a building with wiring and plumbing, which give the current somewhere to go. If there is no building, a hard topped vehicle with the windows up is the fallback. A site trailer counts. An open sided tent, a shed, a portable toilet and a pickup bed do not.

You stay in shelter for thirty minutes after the last thunder. Not after the last flash, and not after the rain stops. Thirty minutes from the last thing you heard, and the clock restarts every time you hear another one.

The rest of severe weather is wind. Lifts and cranes have wind limits from the manufacturer and they are lower than people expect, and a sheet of plywood or a stack of siding becomes a different object at forty miles an hour.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The tallest thing on this site, and who works on it.
- The building or trailer you would shelter in, and how long the walk is.
- The vehicles here, and which of them are hard topped.
- Loose sheet material, and where it goes when a wind warning comes in.

- The lift, and the wind speed on its plate.
- Whoever is watching the forecast today, and on what.

The rules that apply

- First thunder stops the work. Not first lightning seen, first thunder heard.
- Everyone comes down off cranes, scaffolds, roofs, lifts and ladders before sheltering.
- Shelter is a substantial building with wiring and plumbing, or a hard topped vehicle with the windows up if there is no building.
- Nobody returns to work until 30 minutes after the last thunder, and the clock restarts on each new rumble.
- Stay away from isolated tall trees, hilltops, utility poles, towers, cranes, large equipment, ladders, scaffolding and rooftops.
- Lifts and cranes come down to the manufacturer's wind limit, and loose sheet material is secured before the wind arrives, not during it.

Ask the crew

- How long from first thunder until everybody here is inside something?
- Where exactly is inside, and does it have wiring and plumbing?
- How long do we wait, and from what moment?

Close with this

Thirty minutes of standing in a trailer is the cheapest thing that will happen on this job all year.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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This talk is general safety information for a crew briefing, not legal advice and not a substitute for the training your employees are required to have. Standards are quoted for orientation only. Check the current text of the standard and your own state plan, which may be stricter than the federal rule.