



## THUNDERSTORM SAFETY ALERT

Within a 30-day period from the end of May to the end of June 2008, 10 wildland firefighters were injured after being struck by lightning while conducting fire operations. Two of these firefighters were hit on a prescribed fire in Montana, eight others were struck in North Carolina. Thunderstorms continue to be predicted in most of the west and parts of the southeast.

Clearly, lightning is a hazard in the wildland fire environment--one that will always have potential to injure or kill firefighters. Two wildland firefighters were killed by lightning on the North Stansbury Fire in Utah on August, 23, 2000. Nationwide, 60 people are killed by lightning each year and another 340 are injured; many of these injuries are of a life-changing nature.

Firefighters can take specific actions to mitigate the hazard they face from lightning. Observe the 30/30 rule: If you see lightning and hear thunderclaps within 30 seconds of each other, take storm countermeasures. Do not resume work in exposed areas until 30 minutes after storm activity has passed. Other thunder storm countermeasures include:

- Take shelter in a vehicle or building if possible.
- If outdoors, find a low spot away from tall trees, wire fences, utility lines and other elevated conductive objects.
- If in the woods, move to an area with shorter trees.
- If in open country, crouch low, minimizing your contact with the ground. Never lie flat on the ground.
- Don't group together.

In addition to lightning, thunderstorm activity poses other threats to wildland firefighters.

**Outflow winds and downbursts can dramatically affect fire behavior** miles away from a thunder cell; this has been noted as a causal factor in a number of fatalities.

Localized heavy precipitation can also occur so flash flooding is a potential concern in low lying areas.

Wildland firefighters are urged to review the Thunderstorm Safety section of the Incident Response Pocket Guide, page 75, and the Six Minutes for Safety lesson on Thunderstorm Safety: [http://www.nifc.gov/sixminutes/dsp\\_discussion.php?id=56](http://www.nifc.gov/sixminutes/dsp_discussion.php?id=56)