

# WARHorses TIP Topic – Lightning

**What to do when you are caught outdoors during a lightning storm.** The safest place to be during a lightning storm is indoors. The best precaution you can take is to be aware of the weather before and during your ride. If you are caught outdoors in a storm The National Weather Service recommends these actions to decrease your risk of injury or death.



## PRECAUTIONS

- Do not be the highest object.
- Dismount and lead your horse.
- Avoid hills, ridges and peaks. Move to the lowest possible elevations. Shelter at the bottom of a ravine, the leeward side (the side opposite the approaching storm) is best.
- Do not use a cliff or rocky overhang for shelter. If lightning strikes above, it will travel downward along the face of the hill.
- Do not hide in a cave entrance unless you can safely move deep within. The cave is not safe if the floor is wet.
- Do not shelter under an isolate tree.
- Seek a wooded area ideally where the trees are a similar size, avoid individual trees that stand above the canopy. A tree remains a lightning target, sheltering within woods lessens the odds of a strike in your area.
- Avoid water; ponds, rivers, creeks, puddles as water acts as a conductor for electrical current.
- Man-made conductors to avoid include; barbed wire fences, power lines and wet lead ropes.
- Do not lie flat on the ground this increases your exposure to ground current.
- If you are in the open turn make yourself small by curling into a ball. Minimize your contact with the ground by keeping your feet close together or better, by sitting on a backpack or saddlebag (something non-conductive).
- If you are in a group, do not huddle together. Spread out at least 20 feet apart. This will reduce the risk of multiple injuries.
- If possible tie your horse to a small tree, ground stake (not metal) or hobble. If you are riding in a group, tether the horses at least 20 feet apart. Then move away from the animals.
- It is ok to use your cell phone during a lightning storm however lithium batteries are intolerant to excessive heat and may explode from the heat generated by a nearby bolt.
- If you can not shelter in a barn, your horse trailer is an option. If your trailer is struck, the current should move along the metal frame, around occupants, to the ground.

## The 30-30 LIGHTNING SAFETY RULE

*(Courtesy the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)*

- Seek shelter indoors if you see lightning and hear thunder less than 30 seconds afterwards.
- Stay indoors for 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder.