

# Safety and health alert

## 08/99 Jockey dies when hit by lightning

### Incident

A 23-year-old jockey died as a result of being struck by lightning while exercising a horse at a racetrack. Whilst this death involved a person in sporting activity, the recommendations and preventative strategies apply not only to people at work, but to any person who is outdoors during an electrical storm.

### Factors

- electrical storms were not seen as a hazard when training horses. The only foreseen risk was that of a horse being frightened or "spooked" and throwing the rider; and
- there was no clear, written, recall system to summons riders from the track in an emergency, such as an electrical storm.

### Recommendations

Employers must recognise the hazards associated with an electrical storm, have safe systems of work and procedures in place, preferably written, to minimise the risk of injury or harm to their employees during such an event.

On an individual basis, if caught outdoors during an electrical storm:

- never shelter under trees, the electrolyte in your body is a better conductor of electricity than a tree;
- if boating, go to shore;
- don't handle fishing rods, umbrellas, golf clubs, or any other metallic objects and stay clear of sheet metal and wire fences and structures such as clothes lines; and
- avoid being the highest object, crouch down with your feet together.

Other major hazards associated with an electrical storm:

- don't use a hard-wired telephone during electrical storms, except in an emergency. 80% of persons injured during electrical storms have been using the telephone;
- don't use hard wired electrical equipment or hand held tools or appliances; and
- avoid standing barefooted on wet or concrete floors or surfaces.

### Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site [www.worksafe.wa.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.wa.gov.au), or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: [safety@docep.wa.gov.au](mailto:safety@docep.wa.gov.au).

