

Make sure you're prepared before a storm hits

Don't underestimate the damage that can be done by a thunderstorm. Before lightning strikes, be prepared. Some simple preparations can protect your home and family.

- Have a reliable light source in case of a power outage. A rechargeable flashlight, which automatically turns itself on when the power fails, is a good idea. Just plug it into an outlet in a convenient location, such as the kitchen, and keep it there.

The indicator light lets you know it's charging, and because it is continuously charged, there's no need to worry that the batteries will be dead just when you need a flashlight the most. It's also easy to find when the lights go out.

- Be aware of lightning conductors in your home. Water, some metal plumbing pipes, televisions, telephones, fireplaces and radiators are some conductors lightning can travel through. During a storm,

don't do the dishes, talk on the phone or sit in a room with a chimney.

- Don't unplug appliances during a storm. A powerful bolt can travel through a socket and jump out at you. Do unplug anything near a bathtub or sink, such as a hair dryer or radio.

- Answering machines, feature phones, fax machines and computer modems can be ruined by a strong surge during a storm. Disconnect phones during a storm or install an

automatic surge-protection system.

- During an electrical storm, do not go outside, and avoid being exposed on a high place. Stay away from isolated shelters or trees because they are easy targets for lightning.

- Don't use flammable items such as gasoline.

- Remove metal leashes or collars from pets and don't leave them on a chain during a storm. If possible, bring pets inside during a storm. If not,

use a rope or another non-conductive material to restrain your pet.

- Being the victim of previous lightning damage won't protect you. Lightning can strike the same place twice. The Empire State Building in New York City has been struck as many as 48 times a year.

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