

Protection from Lightning

The USGA has long been concerned about the danger to persons on a golf course in a lightning storm. During the last decade we have periodically issued suggestions for protection under such circumstances. The suggestions are in the Rules of Golf booklet and also are published in poster form for display at clubs.

In the Rules of Golf there is recognition of the danger of lightning. Rule 20 (1a) permits a player to discontinue play or delay to start, without penalty, if he thinks he is endangered by lightning. Contestants in USGA Championships rarely invoke this privilege, for the USGA rigs a siren prior to each competition and sounds three notes to signify play is discontinued whenever lightning threatens.

Posters Available

It is recommended that clubs call their members' attention to the suggestions for "Protection of Persons against Lightning on Golf Courses" and that committees install and use warning sirens during competitions. Copies of the suggestions can be obtained from the USGA.

The fact that there have been very few deaths by lightning on golf courses in recent years is a source of gratification, particularly in the light of a bulletin on "The Death Toll from Lightning" issued by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. to point up the grave dangers. It states:

"Now is an opportune time to call attention to the danger of lightning, because this hazard takes a larger toll of life during the summer months than at any other season of the year. Lightning kills around 400 persons annually in the United States. . .

"One-third of the victims lost their lives when they sought shelter under a tree, and by so doing they increased the danger of being struck. Trees, and particularly isolated trees, because of their height, are more likely to be struck than persons; and after striking the tree, the bolt may flash sideways or, after

reaching the base of the tree, it may run along the ground and strike anyone in its path. . .

"The practice of seeking refuge in small sheds, especially in exposed areas, is also dangerous. These structures are a more likely target than are individuals. In this insurance experience, there are instances of men being struck in small farm barns, where they were waiting for the storm to subside. In one of these cases, the victim was struck while leaning against the wooden wall; a friend standing in the center of the barn was unharmed. Another was killed when seeking shelter in a small, isolated wooden bathhouse at a beach. The records show also that one person was killed while seeking shelter in a small ticket booth at a baseball field; the bolt struck a nearby telephone pole and then ran along the wire to the booth. One youngster camping in a public park was fatally struck as he held on to the pole of his small tent, trying to keep the tent from being blown down; the pole was capped with a metal fixture. . . One golf caddie was killed as his group continued to play during a thunderstorm. . .

"The highest rates (of death) are found in some of the Mountain States and bordering areas. . . A group of states in the southeast corner of the country also have comparatively high death rates from lightning. . . Minimum rates, on the other hand, are found generally in the Pacific Coast, New England and Middle Atlantic regions."

No Hazard Too Awesome

Chick Harbert has hit some phenomenal tee shots on courses all over the country. Now it appears that he may have run out of worth-while targets within such limited confines.

On a trip from Tucson to San Antonio, Harbert stopped by the Pecos River Canyon in the Texas desert and smote a drive across the canyon on his first attempt, to the consternation of Buck White and Lew Worsham.