Lightning safety

This month’s column is inspired by a safety activist who was unable to find any USPS training material on lightning safety at work. In our review of all available materials, the only lightning safety talk published by the USPS is found in Publication 129 (March 1999, pages 277-278) but is titled “Off-the-Job Safety” and in part conveys the following:

...While it may be interesting to watch a thunderstorm from your front door or a window in your home, it is not safe. Stay away from doors, windows, fireplaces, stoves, metal pipes, sinks, and plug-in electrical appliances such as hair dryers and electric razors.

Remain indoors if possible...If you must be outside and need to find shelter, try to find a building protected by a lightning system. A large, unprotected building offers a degree of safety if you stay away from plumbing, wiring and appliances. Closed automobiles provide a protective non-grounded metal shell for safety. When you can’t find one of these shelters, a ravine or valley will offer some protection.

The best thing to do is to avoid lightning storms by staying indoors if possible...

In February, NALC requested a meeting with the USPS to develop lightning safety training materials for you at work. As I prepare this month’s column, there were no takers; therefore, NALC offers the following information gathered from federal agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Weather Service (NWS).

All of these agencies have put out the same key message, which is: “When thunder roars, go indoors.”

The federal agencies referenced above have issued a uniform opinion that lightning is a known hazard likely to cause serious injury or death and have recommended that workers move indoors to get out of harm’s way when we hear thunder nearby.

On June 15, 2010, Ferguson, MO, letter carrier Christina Jones, a member of St. Louis Branch 343, found herself caught in the middle of a thunderstorm while delivering her route. She took cover under a tree. Christina passed away from the injuries suffered in a lightning strike. At the time of her death, she left behind her 6-year-old son, Dylon.

It’s time that management sent out an educational message to protect you.

Keep an eye on each other.

Above, left: St. Louis Branch 343 member Christina Jones with her son, Dylon. Above, right: A rememberance vigil for Jones at the tree she took cover under during a lighting storm that claimed her life.