

MEN'S JOURNAL

Your Chances of Getting Struck by Lightning Are on the Rise

By [Jillian Rose Lim](#)

A new study paints a picture of a lightning-filled world.

Your chances of getting struck by lightning are pretty slim — only about 50 people on the planet die from lightning each year. But [new research](#) shows that the frequency of lightning strikes will actually increase in the coming years as the Earth continues to get hotter because of global warming. At the University of California, Berkeley, David S. Roms and his team looked into how changing elements in our environment could influence our activities in the future, and concluded that the number of lightning strikes will increase by 12 percent for every 1 degree Celsius the earth heats up. Roms and his team predicted that the rate of strikes will increase by 50 percent from 2000 to 2100. "For every 2 lightning strikes there were at the beginning of the century, there'll be about 3 at the end," says Roms.

That's because the hotter temperatures get, the more likely lightning will strike during a thunderstorm. Lightning thrives on hot air — which is why it's more common during summer months and in humid places like Florida, "lightning alley", and the south.

His team used information from existing global climate models — which contain climate data like how much rainfall there is per year — to deduce how often lightning would strike in future years. They measured the precipitation rate (to make lightning during a thunderstorm, you need water) and how quickly hot air rises in clouds. "It's the interaction between those different states of water that create lightning," says Roms. When they compared the products of their formula with the actual number of lightning strikes in the past, they found the numbers matched — meaning that future predicts might also be correct, too.

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Though it's hard to say how this will actually play out, Roms says the increase in strikes could have some implications for campers, hikers, and nature-lovers. "If you're outdoors, you might worry about direct lightning strikes," Roms says. "The number of fatalities from the 1950s to 2000s has come down, but it's still a significant event for those involved, and their families." And while only 10 percent of people struck by lightning are killed, 90 percent are left with varying levels of disability or trauma.

More lightning streaks could also mean more forest fires. "We haven't done the rigorous research yet, but it is plausible that this increase will trigger more wildfires," says Roms. Half of wildfires are triggered by lightning strikes (the other half is caused by human activity), leading to destroyed habitats, homes, vegetation and crops. "What's worse, the wildfires triggered by lightning are the most difficult to combat because they can be triggered in areas far from fire stations," says Roms.

The increase in lightning is the result of changing factors in the environment that we need to be aware of, especially with our actions, says Roms. "The most important thing we can do is press for action on climate change," he says. As individuals, you can educate yourself on how the [U.N. is brainstorming to](#)

[confront climate change](#) and join the conversation on raising awareness. "If we continue burning fossil fuels like we have, we're going to get substantial global warming, and this increase in lightning strikes will come part of the ride," Romps adds.