



Risk management



Lightning safety for organized outdoor athletic events

The following has been prepared by the National Lightning Safety Institute, Louisville, CO.

Practice and training increase athletic performance. Similarly, preparedness can reduce the risk of the lightning hazard. Lightning is the most frequent weather hazard and has impacted athletic events such as baseball, football, lacrosse, skiing, swimming, soccer, tennis, track and field events.

Education is the single most important means to achieve lightning safety. A lightning safety program should be implemented at every facility. The following steps are suggested:

- 1 A responsible person should be designated to monitor weather conditions. Local weather forecasts - from The Weather Channel, NOAA Weather Radio, or local TV stations - should be observed 24 hours prior to athletic events. An inexpensive portable weather radio is recommended for obtaining timely storm data.
- 2 Suspension and resumption of athletic activities should be planned in advance. Understanding of SAFE shelters is essential. SAFE evacuation sites include:
 - Fully enclosed metal vehicles with windows up
 - Substantial buildings
 - The low ground—seek cover in clumps of bushes
- 3 UNSAFE SHELTER AREAS include all outdoor metal objects like flag poles, fences and gates, high mast light poles, metal bleachers, golf carts, machinery, etc. AVOID trees. AVOID water. AVOID open fields. AVOID the high ground.
- 4 To estimate the distance between you and a lightning flash, use the “Flash to Bang” method: If you observe lightning, count the number of seconds until you hear thunder. Divide the number of seconds by five to get the distance in miles. Example: If you see lightning and it takes 10 seconds before you hear the thunder, then the lightning is 2 miles away from you (10 divided by 5 = 2 miles). Get to a safe location if the time between the lightning flash and the rumble of thunder is 30 seconds or less. A good lightning safety motto is: “If you can see it (lightning) flee it; if you can hear it (thunder), clear it.”
- 5 If you feel your hair standing on end, and/or hear “crackling noises,” you are in lightning’s electric field. If caught outside during close-in lightning, immediately remove metal objects (including baseball cap), place your feet together, duck your head, and crouch down low in baseball catcher’s stance with hands on knees.
- 6 Wait a minimum of 30 minutes from the last observed lightning or thunder before resuming activities.
- 7 People who have been struck by lightning do not carry an electrical charge and are safe to handle. Apply first aid immediately if you are qualified to do so. Get emergency help promptly.

You can learn more about lightning safety from the National Lightning Safety Institute at lightningsafety.com.