

Lightning Safety for Organized Outdoor Athletic Events

Practice and training increase recreation performance. Similarly, preparedness can reduce the risk of the lightning hazard. Lightning is the most frequent weather hazard impacting athletics events. Baseball, football, lacrosse, skiing, swimming, soccer, tennis, track and field events...all these and other outdoor sports have been visited by lightning.

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 lightning shelters is essential. SAFE evacuation sites include:
 - a. Fully enclosed metal vehicles with windows up.
 - b. Substantial buildings.
 - c. The low ground. Seek cover in clumps of bushes.
3. UNSAFE LIGHTNING SHELTER AREAS include all outdoor metal objects like flag poles, fences and gates, high mast light poles, metal bleachers, golf cars, machinery, etc. AVOID trees. AVOID water. AVOID open fields. AVOID the high ground.
4. Lightning's distance from you is easy to calculate: if you hear thunder, it and the associated lightning are within auditory range...about 6-8 miles away. The distance from Strike A to Strike B also can be 6-8 miles. Ask yourself why you should NOT go to shelter immediately. Of course, different distances to shelter will determine different times to suspend activities. 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.

Teach this safety slogan:

"If you can see it, flee it; if you can hear it, clear it."

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Prepared by the National Lightning Safety Institute, Louisville, CO.

http://www.lightningsafety.com/nlsi_pls/ncaa.html