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Lightning Safety and Outdoor Sports Activities

Sports officials must understand thunderstorms and lightning to ensure they make educated decisions on when to seek safety. Without this knowledge, officials base their decisions on personal experience and the desire to complete the activity. The National Weather Service recommends officials of organized sports have a lightning safety plan they follow without exception. The plan should give clear, specific safety guidelines to eliminate errors in judgment. The guidelines should address the following questions:

- When should activities be stopped?
- Where should people go for safety?
- When should activities be resumed?
- Who should monitor the weather and who decides when to stop activities?
- What should be done if someone is struck by lightning?

Before an event, organizers should listen to the latest forecast to determine the likelihood of thunderstorms. A NOAA Weather Radio is a good source of up-to-date weather information. If thunderstorms are forecast, organizers should consider canceling or postponing the activity. Once people start to arrive at an event, the guidelines in the lightning safety plan should be followed. The National Weather Service has developed several [lightning safety toolkits](#) groups can use to develop their safety plan. Below is some information to consider when making a lightning safety plan.

Stopping Activities

In general, a significant lightning threat extends outward from the base of a thunderstorm cloud about 6 to 10 miles. Therefore, people should be in a safe place when a thunderstorm is 6 to 10 miles away. Also, a plan's guidelines should account for the time it will take for everyone to get to safety. Here are some criteria that could be used to stop activities:

- **If you see lightning.** The ability to see lightning varies depending on the time of day, weather conditions, and obstructions such as trees, mountains, etc. In clear air, and especially at night, lightning can be seen from storms more than 10 miles away provided that obstructions don't limit the view of the thunderstorm.
- **If you hear thunder.** Thunder can usually be heard for a distance of about 10 miles provided that there is no background noise. Traffic, wind, and precipitation may limit the ability to hear thunder to less than 10 miles. If you hear thunder, though, it's a safe bet that the storm is within ten miles.

If skies look threatening. Thunderstorms can develop directly overhead and some storms may develop

Seeking Safe Shelter

No place OUTSIDE is safe in or near a thunderstorm. Stop what you are doing and get to a safe place immediately. **Small outdoor buildings including dugouts, rain shelters, sheds, etc., are NOT SAFE.** Substantial buildings with wiring and plumbing are the safest places. Office buildings, schools, and homes offer good protection. Once inside, stay away from windows and doors and anything that conducts electricity such as corded phones, wiring, plumbing, and anything connected to these.

A **hard-topped metal vehicle** with the windows closed also provides good protection. Avoid contact with metal in the vehicle and try to keep away from windows.

Resuming Activities

Because electrical charges can linger in clouds after a thunderstorm has passed, experts agree that people should wait at least 30 minutes after the storm before resuming activities.

Monitoring the Weather and Making Decisions

Lightning safety plans should specify that someone be designated to monitor the weather for lightning. The 'lightning monitor' should not be the coach, umpire, or referee, since they busy doing other things and can't adequately monitor conditions. . The 'lightning monitor' must know the plan's guidelines and be empowered to follow the guidelines.

Helping Lightning Victims

Most victims can survive a lightning strike; however, medical attention may be needed immediately. Call for medical help. Victims do not carry an electrical charge. In many cases, the victim's heart or breathing may have stopped. CPR or an AED may be needed to revive them. Â Continue to monitor the victim until medical help arrives. If possible, move the victim to a safer place away from the threat of another lightning strike.

More information:

- [Lightning Safety for the Family](#)
- Local lightning or weather safety information: contact the nearest [National Weather Service Office](#) nearest you.
- Find out more about [NOAA Weather Radio](#)

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