

Lightning safety for organized outdoor athletic 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. NOAA Weather Radio, or local TV and radio weather forecasts - should be monitored 24 hours prior to events. An inexpensive portable ALERT 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 with pipe-in plumbing; and low

ground. Seek cover in clumps of bushes not trees.

3. UNSAFE SHELTER AREAS include all buildings without plumbing, 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. AVOID dugouts (they are connected to metal objects!)

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 or less away. 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 (CPR) if you are qualified to do so. Get emergency help promptly. ■

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