

VHSL SMAC Recommended Best Practices Regarding Lightning/Severe Weather during Athletic Events

Before the Event

- Identify a designated *Weather Watcher*
 - Ideally this person should not be a coach, contest official/umpire or other individual who is unable to devote attention required to monitor weather conditions
 - This individual should have ready access to weather information sources (local weather reports and warnings; current weather radar) for monitoring weather forecasts and current conditions
 - Responsibilities
 - Monitors weather conditions before and during the event
 - Communicates changes in weather conditions to designated event official
- Identify a designated *Event Manager*
 - Ideally this person is a school employee (administrator, game manager, athletic trainer, etc) who has the authority to intervene and stop the contest in the event weather conditions warrant
 - Responsibilities
 - Communicates with weather watcher regarding weather forecast and changing weather conditions
 - Communicates with contest officials in the event weather conditions force postponement or cancellation of event
- Identify *Safe Shelter* for contest participants and spectators
 - Safe Shelter is defined as a substantial building (one with plumbing and wiring) such as a house, school, church, office building, indoor concourse or recreation center or an enclosed metal vehicle (car or bus)
 - Baseball/softball dugouts, sheds, partially enclosed vending/concession areas or other covered but otherwise open pavilions, patios or shelters; golf carts or other open cab vehicles are unsafe and not to be utilized as safe shelter

During the Event

- Before the event begins, participants, coaches and attendees will be notified that lightning/inclement weather is possible during the course of the event/contest
- Instructions will be provided regarding what protective measures will be taken if a weather threat materializes, including the location of the nearest designated safe shelter
 - Sample weather warning message
- Weather watcher, event official and other event staff observe for changing weather conditions. When criteria for postponing event are met (see *NFHS Guidelines on Handling Contests During Lightning Disturbances*):
 - Event official communicates with contest officials, coaches and participants regarding need to postpone contest and evacuate facility
 - PA announcement directs spectators to evacuate facility and head to designated safe shelter
- It is recommended that if one event is postponed due to inclement weather, all outdoor events are also postponed and the contest/practice facilities evacuated

Resuming the Event

- Refer to the *NFHS Guidelines on Handling Contests During Lightning Disturbances* for procedures for resuming contests following a weather delay

Lightning Safety Tips

- Lightning can strike outside of the rain area or thunderstorm cloud. In extreme cases, “bolts from the blue” can strike 10-15 miles from the thunderstorm. Don’t wait for rain to take shelter and don’t leave shelter just because the rain has let up.
- Stay away from the tallest trees or lone objects (such as light poles or flagpoles), metal objects (such as metal fences or metal bleachers), individual trees, standing pools of water, and open fields. Avoid being the highest object in a field, and **DO NOT** take shelter under a single, tall tree. Do not remain in a boat, or swim in the open water. Pay much more attention to the lightning threat than to the rain. Lightning can strike far from the rain shaft.
- If there is no safe shelter within a reasonable distance away, crouch in a thick grove of small trees surrounded by taller trees, or in a dry ditch. Assume a crouched position on the ground with only the balls of your feet touching the ground, wrap your arms around your knees and lower your head. Minimize your body’s surface area, and minimize contact with the ground. **DO NOT LIE FLAT!**
- If a person feels his or her hair stand on end, or their skin tingle, immediately crouch, as described above
- If someone is struck by lightning:
 - Immediate medical attention is needed. Activate EMS and retrieve an AED if available.
 - Victims **DO NOT** carry an electrical charge and can be touched. In many cases, the victim’s heart and/or breathing may stop and rescue breathing and/or CPR or an AED may be needed.
 - Monitor the victim until medical help arrives; heart and/or respiratory problems could persist, or the victim could go into shock. If possible, move the victim to a safer place away from the threat of another lightning strike.

Sample Severe Weather Announcements

- Before the event:

Local forecasts indicate a potential for thunderstorms for this area. In the event the presence of lightning causes a delay in this athletic contest, you will be asked to exit the stadium in an orderly fashion and seek safe shelter inside the school building. ALL spectators and players should seek safe shelter within the school building at that time. The contest will resume 30 minutes after the last evidence of cloud to ground lightning- please remain in the school building until that time.
- Clear the area

Due to lightning in the area, ALL individuals should move in an orderly fashion to an area of safe shelter inside the school building at this time. (Repeat as necessary)

Adapted from the *National Weather Service Large Venue Lightning Toolkit* and the *National Weather Service Community Preparedness Toolkit*.

Resources

- *NFHS Guidelines on Handling Contests During Lightning Disturbances*
- *National Weather Service Large Venue Lightning Toolkit*
- *National Weather Service Community Preparedness Toolkit*
- *Weather Underground* (<http://www.wunderground.com/maps/>)