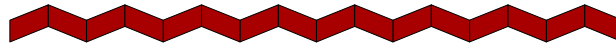




# GUIDELINES FOR LIGHTNING SAFETY DURING ATHLETIC EVENTS AND ON SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS



## Office of Safety and Security Fact Sheet

Coaches and sports officials, physical education teachers, playground monitors, and school administrators must recognize the hazard posed by lightning and be prepared to implement procedures intended to minimize the risk of serious injury or death during outdoor activities. Suspension and resumption of activities should be planned in advance. The following guidelines are offered to facilitate the development of an event or site-specific lightning safety program:

- \* Determine the closest safe structures in advance of any activity. Safe structures include the nearest school building, a complete enclosure, or a fully enclosed metal vehicle with windows tightly closed. Press boxes, sheds, storage buildings, or dugouts **will not** provide adequate protection.
- \* Practice the flash-to-bang method of measuring of lightning distance as it approaches. Using this method, one counts the seconds from seeing the stroke to hearing the thunder. For each 5-second count, lightning is 1 mile away. So, at 25 seconds the strike is 5 miles away; at 20 seconds the strike is 4 miles away.
- \* Select a distinctive, recognizable method to announce or signal the lightning warning and clear-the-area order, such as blasts of a whistle and a shouted command.
- \* Estimate the amount of time required to safely evacuate, at a comfortable pace, to the designated shelter(s). Decide the minimum safe flash-to-bang interval at which a clear-the-area signal must be given. Remember that lightning may strike as many as 10 miles from the rain that may accompany a thunderstorm. Of course, different distances to shelter, the number of people present, and the variation in mobility of the people seeking shelter will determine different flash-to-bang intervals to suspend activities.
- \* Prior to athletic events, the athletic administrator or game manager must make sure that visiting coaches, school administrators, and officials are informed of the lightning safety guidelines in effect at the facility.
- \* Inform participants and spectators when a thunderstorm watch is in effect. Tell them that play will be suspended as lightning approaches, what the clear-the-area signal is, where to go for safe shelter, and what routes to take as they evacuate the area. Prior to outdoor competitions, this should include a formal announcement over the public address system.
- \* Designate one person who is responsible for monitoring the weather forecasts, watching for the developing weather conditions accompanied by lightning, and timing the flash-to-bang intervals at the first sound of thunder. The use of an inexpensive radio tuned to the all-weather or all-news radio station is recommended (bursts of static on the radio indicate lightning in the area). This person should have the authority to order that the clear-the-area signal be given or be in constant contact with the person who does have the authority.

**At a count of 15 seconds (3 miles) there is imminent danger, and immediate defensive action must be taken.** When lightning strikes this close, participants and spectators are in immediate danger. It is strongly recommended that the clear-the-area signal be given when the flash-to-bang count is no less than 30 seconds (6 miles), especially when small children or a large number of spectators are at risk.

- \* Wait a minimum of 30 minutes from the last nearby lightning strike (flash-to-bang count no less than 30 seconds) before resuming activities.

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### Resources:

National Lightning Safety Institute, 303-666-8817 or <http://lightningsafety.com>

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service, <http://www.nws.noaa.gov>