

LIGHTNING SAFETY

Lightning may be the most frequently encountered severe storm hazard endangering physically active people each year. Millions of lightning flashes strike the ground annually in the United States, causing nearly 100 deaths and 400 injuries. Three quarters of all lightning casualties occur between May and September, and nearly four fifths occur between 10:00 am and 7:00 pm, which coincides with the hours for most athletic events.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIGHTNING SAFETY

1. Establish a chain of command that identifies who is to make the call to remove individuals from the field.
2. Name a designated weather watcher (A person who actively looks for the signs of threatening weather and notifies the chain of command if severe weather becomes dangerous).
3. Have a means of monitoring local weather forecasts and warnings.
4. Designate a safe shelter for each venue. See examples below.
5. Use the Flash-to-Bang count to determine when to go to safety. By the time the flash-to-bang count approaches thirty seconds all individuals should already be inside a safe structure. See method of determining Flash-to-Bang count below.
6. Once activities have been suspended, wait at least thirty minutes following the last sound of thunder or lightning flash prior to resuming activity or returning outdoors.
7. Avoid being the highest point in an open field, in contact with, or proximity to the highest point, as well as being on the open water. Do not take shelter under or near trees, flagpoles, or light poles.
8. Assume that lightning safe position (crouched on the ground weight on the balls of the feet, feet together, head lowered, and ears covered) for individuals who feel their hair stand on end, skin tingle, or hear “crackling” noises. Do not lie flat on the ground.
9. Observe the following basic first aid procedures in managing victims of a lightning strike.
 - Activate local EMS
 - Lightning victims do not “carry a charge” and are safe to touch.
 - If necessary, move the victim with care to a safer location.
 - Evaluate airway, breathing, and circulation, and begin CPR if necessary.
 - Evaluate and treat for hypothermia, shock, fractures, and/or burns.
10. All individuals have the right to leave an athletic site in order to seek a safe structure if the person feels in danger of impending lightning activity, without fear of repercussions or penalty from anyone.

DEFINITIONS

Safe Shelter:

1. A safe location is any substantial, frequently inhabited building. The building should have four solid walls (not a dug-out), electrical and telephone wiring, as well as plumbing, all of which aid in grounding a structure.
2. The secondary choice for a safer location from the lightning hazard is a fully enclosed vehicle with a metal roof and the windows completely closed. It is important not to touch any part of the metal framework of the vehicle while inside it during ongoing thunderstorms.

LIGHTNING-DECISION MAKING

The decision to suspend a game or practice will be made by the following individuals.

Practice:

The final decision will be made by the head coach or the acting head coach and trainer. The coaching staff and trainers must assess the dangers by the methods stated in this policy. The athletic trainers will monitor and advise the coach supervising the activity as to the danger of lightning. The responsibility still remains with the coach supervising the activity to remove the team or individuals from the field or event site. Any individual, athlete or staff who feels he or she is in danger of lightning has the right to leave the field and seek safe shelter.

Prior to Contest:

The final decision will be made by the Game Administrator, Head Coaches and Officials. The athletic trainers will advise the Game Administrator, Head Coaches and Officials as to the danger of lightning. The responsibility still remains with the Game Administrator, or Head Coaches and Officials if present to remove the teams or individuals from the field or event site. Any individual, athlete or staff who feels he or she is in danger of lightning has the right to leave the field and seek safe shelter. Staff who feels he or she is in danger of lightning has the right to leave the field and seek safe shelter.

*If a decision to remove the team has been made the Game Administrator must inform all fans of the decision and ask that they seek shelter.

During Contest:

The final decision will be made by the Head Official. The Game Administrator, Head Coach and Trainer shall inform head official of the dangers associated with lightning and what our policy is. The athletic trainers will advise the Game Administrator, Officials and Head Coach as to the danger of lightning. The responsibility still remains with the Administrator and head official supervising the activity to remove the teams or individuals from the field or event site.

METHODS OF GATHERING LIGHTNING INFORMATION

Flash-to Bang:

To use the flash-to-bang method, begin counting when sighting a lightning flash. Counting is stopped when the associated bang (thunder) is heard. Divide this count by five to determine the distance to the lightning flash (in miles). For example, a flash-to-bang count of thirty seconds equates to a distance of six miles. Lightning has struck from a far away as 10 miles from the storm center.

Sky-Scan or similar device

This is a small battery operated lightning detection device that estimates the distance of lightning. This unit can give a false reading because of interference with communication devices and other electrical equipment. Sky-Scan should be used in conjunction with other methods. The unit must be turned on and be powered by a good 9-volt battery and be pointed toward the storm clouds. The display lights up with a range in miles of the last strike detected. All EPISD training staff have a lightning meter for use at athletic events and practices.

***Postpone or suspend activity if a thunderstorm appears imminent before or during an activity or contest (irrespective of whether lightning is seen or thunder is heard) until the hazard has passed. Signs of imminent thunderstorm activity are darkening clouds, high winds, and thunder or lightning activity.**