

Weather: It's an Emergency!

When storm clouds blow in, do your volunteers know what to do?

A clear plan of action helps everyone do the right thing as quickly as needed, so no one is exposed to unnecessary risk through delay or second-guessing.

Remember: Lightning is one of the most underrated killers, causing more fatalities annually than all other natural disasters except flooding. Florida is the top state for lightning strikes, but all states share the risk of lightning deaths and injuries.

Many people who are “only” injured from lightning strikes suffer long-term physical and neurological disabilities. If a storm approaches, evacuate the field, staying away from metal structures and objects.

1. Watch for developing or approaching storms; use all available technology to determine your fields' risk.

- Listen to weather radio alerts for severe thunderstorms with high winds — TAKE CARE: alerts are NOT issued “just” for thunderstorms with lightning
- Check websites with local radar tracking, especially those tracking lightning strikes
- Use dedicated lightning alerts — SkyScan™ and ThorGuard™ are two options

2. Clear the field immediately at the first sound of thunder. A thunderstorm can cast lightning up to 10 miles from the edge of the storm, or about as far as the sound thunder can carry.

WHAT TO DO:

- Go to an enclosed building, if one is nearby
- Go to cars, with windows rolled up, if no enclosed building is available
- Complete a check of the facility for anyone still outdoors

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Don't allow players to remain in dugouts or spectators to stay in stands
- Don't carry metal items (like bats) or walk beside metal fences
- Don't go to an open-sided shelter; it is not adequate and should not be used

3. Wait 30 minutes after the last lightning strike/peal of thunder before returning to play

4. Do not leave facility until directed; wait at designated location(s) at field until the game is postponed or cancelled

- Make sure all players are accounted for and leaving with approved person(s)

For most leagues, 10 miles is the point when lightning is too close and fields

are evacuated. This gives everyone time to move to a safe place according to your plan, without risk or panic.

“The bottom line is that if you hear thunder, you need to get inside immediately,” said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, director of NOAA's National Weather Service. “Lightning can strike up to 10 miles from a thunderstorm, which is about the distance that the sound of thunder can travel and be heard. All thunderstorms produce lightning, and each lightning strike is a potential killer.”

Quick Links

For more information on lightning safety, visit NOAA's website at: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov>

To download the Coaches Guide from NOAA, go to: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/overview.htm>

To download the Coaches Guide on Little League's website, to go: <http://www.littleleague.org/programs/asap/signs.asp>

Consider Electronic Solution to Ears and Eyes

If a storm is approaching, many leagues will only know that their players and volunteers are in danger when someone hears thunder. Then, if it wasn't the umpire to hear, a discussion must take place as to whether it really was thunder that was heard, and what to do about it.

For a growing number of leagues, this approach wastes precious time that leaves everyone at risk while a decision is reached to clear the field. These leagues have chosen to use an electronic detector to alert league officials to the approach of storms before thunder can be heard.

SkyScan™ uses a lightning detector to track the electrical disruption caused by lightning and track the distance to your site. The device can be set to different levels of sensitivity, allowing you to see the distance lightning strikes are occurring and alert the umpires to halt play.

ThorGuard™ uses a different approach, determining a storm's electrical potential for unleashing lightning, before the first strike. This device also alerts users to the distance away from a site such potentials are. The manufacturers tout the ability of their device to determine the approaching risk without having to have a storm's first strike be at your facility.