

# NSYSA

## POLICY ON SEVERE WEATHER

Ref: USSF Referee Position Paper, "Dealing With Severe Weather."

Nothing is more important than the safety of the players! Soccer games can always be resumed or replayed. Although the Pacific North West does not experience a high occurrence of severe weather related lightning; coaches and referees **MUST** be aware of the below requirements and **MUST** enforce them! Only the referee official has the authority to suspend a game. However, neither coaches nor referees can be swayed by parents, teams, other coaches, or players; expressing a desire for the game to continue, once severe weather conditions have been recognized.

Since the average distance between successive lightning flashes is approximately two to three miles, ANYTIME that lightning can be seen or thunder is heard, the risk is present.

Weather can be monitored using the following methods:

### 1. Recognition

Monitor Weather Patterns. Be aware of potential thunderstorms by monitoring local weather forecasts the day before and morning of the competition. Scan the skies for signs of potential thunderstorm activity.

### 2. National Weather Service

Weather can also be monitored using small, portable weather radios from the NWS. Many cell phones have apps to accomplish monitoring the weather. The NWS utilizes a system to identify severe storm watches and warnings. A watch indicates conditions are favorable for severe weather to develop in an area. A warning indicates severe weather has been reported in an area, and everyone should take proper precautions.

Any thunderstorm poses a risk of injury or death even though it may not meet the criteria for severe weather. Therefore, anytime thunderstorms are in the forecast (even if it is only a 20 percent chance) event officials shall be at a heightened level of awareness to the potential danger of lightning.

### 3. Evacuation

If lightning is imminent or a thunderstorm is approaching, all personnel, athletes and spectators shall evacuate to available safe structures or shelters.

- (1) No place outside is safe near thunderstorms
- (2) The best shelter is a large, fully enclosed, substantially constructed building. A vehicle with a solid metal roof and metal sides is a reasonable second choice.
- (3) If there is no proper shelter, **avoid** the most dangerous locations: Higher elevations; wide open areas, including fields; tall isolated objects, such as trees, poles, or light posts; unprotected open buildings; rain shelters; bus stops; metal fences and metal bleachers

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### 4. Management

#### **APPLY THE THIRTY-MINUTE RULE**

Competition shall be suspended **once lightning has been recognized or thunder is heard**. When you see lightning, count the time until you hear thunder. If this time is 30 seconds or less, seek proper shelter. It is required to wait at least 30 minutes after the **last** flash of lightning is witnessed or thunder is heard prior to resuming competition.

Given the average rates of thunderstorm travel, the storm should move 10-12 miles away from the area during the 30 minute period. This significantly reduces the risk of local lightning flashes.

Any subsequent lightning or thunder after the beginning of the 30-minute count shall **reset the clock**, and another count shall begin. "Heat lightning" is still lightning and the thirty minute rule applies.

### 5. Multiple field complexes

When there are multiple fields at a complex, if the coaches / officials at one field see lightning or hear thunder and suspend their game, then **ALL** fields at the complex **MUST** also suspend their game! Games will not resume until all officials on all fields agree that thirty minutes has passed since the last lightning flash was seen or thunder heard!

### 6. ENFORCEMENT

All coaches / referee officials are required to enforce this policy. **AND** all referee officials are required to report any violations of this policy. Violations should be reported to the Assignor, Referee Administrator for the applicable league. Failure to enforce this policy or report violations will be subject the offender to disciplinary action by the appropriate Association, which may include suspension.

### 7. Application

This policy shall apply to all competitions within the jurisdiction of NSYSA and WYS. This policy shall also apply to all team practices and team events.

The above policy is the MINIMUM required for all individuals, coaches and referees, participating in game matches or practices governed by NSYSA. Within NSYSA individual Club authorities may adopt a more strict policy than the guidelines set forth here.

Coaches and referees are responsible to understand and enforce any such policies.

Competition authorities may also choose to suspend a game based on possible severe weather even if the signs are not present.

**REMEMBER THAT IT IS ALWAYS BETTER TO ERR ON THE SIDE OF SAFETY!**



## Lightning Safety Outdoors

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Each year, about 400 children and adults in the U.S. are struck by lightning while working outside, at sports events, on the beach, mountain climbing, mowing the lawn or during other outdoor activities. About 80 people are killed and several hundred more are left to cope with permanent disabilities. Many of these tragedies can be avoided. Finishing the game, getting a tan, or completing a work shift aren't worth death or crippling injury.

- All thunderstorms produce lightning and are dangerous. Lightning kills more people each year than tornadoes.
- Lightning often strikes as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall. Many deaths from lightning occur ahead of the storm because people try and wait to the last minute before seeking shelter.
- You are in danger from lightning if you can hear thunder. If you can hear thunder, lightning is close enough that it could strike your location at any moment.
- Lightning injuries can lead to permanent disabilities or death. On average, 20% of strike victims die; 70% of survivors suffer serious long term effects.
- Look for dark cloud bases and increasing wind. Every flash of lightning is dangerous, even the first. Head to safety before that first flash. If you hear thunder, head to safety!
- Blue Skies and Lightning. Lightning can travel sideways for up to 10 miles. Even when the sky looks blue and clear, be cautious. If you hear thunder, take cover. At least 10% of lightning occurs without visible clouds in the sky.

### The Single Most Dangerous Place

Outdoors is the most dangerous place to be during a lightning storm. When lightning is seen or thunder is heard, or when dark clouds are observed, quickly move indoors or into a hard-topped vehicle and remain there until well after the lightning storm ends. Listen to forecasts and warnings through NOAA Weather Radio or your local TV and radio stations. If lightning is forecast, plan an alternate activity or know where you can take cover quickly.

The U.S. lightning season is summer but lightning can strike year round! The Fourth of July is historically one of the most deadly times of the year for lightning. In summer, more people are outside, on the beach, golf course, mountains or ball fields. Outdoor jobs such as construction and agriculture, and outdoor chores such as lawn mowing or house painting are at their peak, putting those involved in danger.

### Safety Rules

1. Postpone activities promptly. Don't wait for rain. Many people take shelter from the rain, but most people struck by lightning are not in the rain! Go quickly inside a completely enclosed building, not a carport, open garage or covered patio. If no enclosed building is convenient, get inside a hard-topped all-metal vehicle. A cave is a good option outside but move as far as possible from the cave entrance.

2. Be the lowest point. Lightning hits the tallest object. In the mountains if you are above tree line, you ARE the highest object around. Quickly get below tree line and get into a grove of small trees. Don't be the second tallest object during a lightning storm! Crouch down if you are in an exposed area.
3. Keep an eye on the sky. Look for darkening skies, flashes of lightning, or increasing wind, which may be signs of an approaching thunderstorm.
4. Listen for the sound of thunder. If you can hear thunder, go to a safe shelter immediately.
5. If you see or hear a thunderstorm coming or your hair stands on end, immediately suspend your game or practice and instruct everyone to go inside a sturdy building or car. Sturdy buildings are the safest place to be. Avoid sheds, picnic shelters, baseball dugouts, and bleachers. If no sturdy building is nearby, a hard-top vehicle with windows closed will offer some protection. The steel frame of the vehicle provides some protection if you are not touching metal.
6. Listen to NOAA Weather Radio. Coaches and other leaders should listen for a tone-alert feature during practice sessions and games.
7. If you can't get to a shelter, stay away from trees. If there is no shelter, crouch in the open, keeping twice as far away from a tree as it is tall.
8. Avoid leaning against vehicles. Get off bicycles and motorcycles.
9. Get out of the water. It's a great conductor of electricity. Stay off the beach and out of small boats or canoes. If caught in a boat, crouch down in the center of the boat away from metal hardware. Swimming, wading, snorkeling and scuba diving are NOT safe. Lightning can strike the water and travel some distance beneath and away from its point of contact. Don't stand in puddles of water, even if wearing rubber boots.
10. Avoid metal! Drop metal backpacks, stay away from clothes lines, fences, exposed sheds and electrically conductive elevated objects. Don't hold on to metal items such as golf clubs, fishing rods, tennis rackets or tools. Large metal objects can conduct lightning. Small metal objects can cause burns.
11. Move away from a group of people. Stay several yards away from other people. Don't share a bleacher bench or huddle in a group.

**What to do if someone is struck by lightning:**

- Call for help. Call 9-1-1 or your local ambulance service. Get medical attention as quickly as possible.
- Give first aid. If the victim has stopped breathing, begin rescue breathing. If the heart has stopped beating, a trained person should give CPR. If the person has a pulse and is breathing, address any other injuries.
- Check for burns in two places. The injured person has received an electric shock and may be burned. Being struck by lightning can also cause nervous system damage, broken bones, and loss of hearing or eyesight. People struck by lightning carry no electrical charge that can shock other people. You can examine them without risk.

**Stay Informed About the Storm**

Listen to NOAA Weather Radio or local media for the latest severe thunderstorm WATCHES and WARNINGS. Severe thunderstorms are those storms with winds in excess of 58 mph or hail larger than 3/4 inches in diameter. When conditions are favorable for severe weather to develop, a severe thunderstorm WATCH is issued.

Weather Service personnel use information from weather radar, satellite, lightning detection, spotters, and other sources to issue severe thunderstorm WARNINGS for areas where severe weather is imminent. Remember, however, that ALL thunderstorms produce deadly lightning.

For more information visit the National Weather Service web site at <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/> (<http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/>)



To: Chair, State Referee Committee  
State Referee Administrators  
State Directors of Referee Instruction  
State Directors of Referee Assessment  
National Referees, Assessors, and Instructors

From: Alfred Kleinaitis  
Manager of Referee Development and Education

**Re: Dealing with Severe Weather**

Date: April 6, 2005

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This position paper provides basic guidelines for dealing with lightning, windstorms, and other severe weather conditions. (This paper supersedes the paper dated September 23, 2003, on the same topic.) The peak season for severe weather occurs in the United States between May and August, typically in the late afternoon and early evening. Before taking any of the actions outlined in sections 1 (Lightning) or 2 (Other types of severe weather), you must consider the instructions in the following paragraph:

Many stadium operators, park districts, and school districts have acquired and installed **advanced technology that can aid the referee in making decisions about weather conditions.** If there is any indication that severe weather may occur, check with the appropriate authorities (field or park manager, athletic director, stadium operations personnel, city or county parks or education departments, etc.) for the latest information before making any decisions. Also check with these authorities during any weather-related interruption, as the new technology may allow you to restart earlier than indicated after a stoppage. It is not necessary to wait thirty (30) minutes when this assistance is available.

#### 1. Lightning

- a. Recognizing the threat
  - (1) Apply the 30-30 rule  
When you see lightning, count the time until you hear thunder. If this time is 30 seconds or less, seek proper shelter. If you can't see the lightning, just hearing the thunder is a good back-up rule. Wait 30 minutes or more after hearing the last thunder before leaving shelter.
  - (2) Know and heed warning systems and community rules  
Many communities or park systems have lightning detection and warning systems. Use this information and obey the rules established by the community or park system.
  - (3) Know and apply the rules or procedures established by the competition authority
  - (4) Minimize the risk of being struck  
Protect the safety of all participants by stopping game activities quickly, so that participants and spectators may retire to a safer place before the lightning threat becomes significant. Remember, if you can hear the thunder, you are within reach of lightning.
- b. Seeking proper shelter
  - (1) No place outside is safe near thunderstorms
  - (2) The best shelter is a large, fully enclosed, substantially constructed building. A vehicle with a solid metal roof and metal sides is a reasonable second choice.
- c. If there is no proper shelter, **avoid** the most dangerous locations: Higher elevations; wide open areas, including fields; tall isolated objects, such as trees, poles, or light posts; unprotected open buildings; rain shelters; bus stops; metal fences and metal bleachers.

- d. If you cannot avoid these locations, crouch down on the balls of your feet, with your head tucked into your chest and your hands over your ears.  
If someone is hit, remember that all deaths from lightning result from cardiac arrest and stopped breathing. CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, respectively, are the recommended first aid. Referees should become involved in such assistance only if they have proper training.
- e. Remain calm. A calm official will often be able to prevent panic by young players.

2. Other types of severe weather

For all other types of severe storms, such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and hail, obey local rules and heed warnings. Clear the field and seek proper shelter immediately – see above. Remember, according to standard weather warning terminology a "*warning*" represents a more immediately likely occurrence than a "*watch*."

**NO SEVERE WEATHER SAFETY GUIDELINES WILL GIVE 100% GUARANTEED TOTAL SAFETY, BUT THESE STEPS WILL HELP YOU AVOID THE VAST MAJORITY OF CASUALTIES.**

If there is a possibility of severe weather, the referee and assistant referees should discuss these guidelines in their pregame meeting and ensure that all officials have a clear understanding of their respective duties. Referees in particular should clearly identify what assistance they expect in detecting and bringing to their immediate attention any dangerous weather conditions which may not be directly visible to them. If such conditions develop only after a match has begun, the referee should take the first stoppage opportunity to quickly review these matters with the assistant referees. A brief word to the coaches regarding steps the referee will take to ensure player safety in threatening weather conditions would be useful.