



# NMAA LIGHTNING/THREATENING WEATHER POLICY AND GUIDELINES

## LIGHTNING AWARENESS

Lightning is one of the most consistent causes of weather-related death or injury in the United States averaging 100 lightning deaths and 1000 injuries annually. Nearly all lightning-related injuries occur between the months of May and September and nearly four fifths occur between 10:00AM and 7:00PM, which coincides with the hours of most athletic events. Generally speaking, it is felt that any time a cloud-to-ground strike of lightning can be seen, or thunder heard, risk is already present. It is time to seek shelter.

## AUTHORITY TO SUSPEND PLAY

*Bylaw 7.10.1*

Once the contest begins the assigned contest officials are responsible for making decisions to suspend or interrupt a contest due to unsafe weather conditions. While the final burden lies with contest officials, it is highly recommended that host site administration and contest officials work together when making any determinations to suspend play and use any and all available information in doing so. On-site medical professionals/athletic trainers should also be consulted and included in the decision-making process. When in doubt, err on the side of safety.

*\*Note: NMAA representatives directing NMAA State Championship events will have final authority on making decisions to postpone or suspend contests due to unsafe weather conditions.*

## CRITERIA FOR SUSPENDING PLAY

*Bylaws 7.9.6 and 7.10.6 – NFHS Recommended Guidelines*

If the local management does not have commercial weather warning equipment or an efficient method of making an accurate, timely decision on location, listening for thunder and using the “flash-to-bang” count is the best way to mitigate the danger. As lightning approaches, the time in seconds from seeing the stroke to hearing the thunder decreases. For each 5-second count, the lightning is 1 mile away. At a count of 15 seconds (3 miles) there is imminent danger. When thunder is heard within 30 seconds of a visible lightning strike (6 miles), or a cloud-to-ground bolt is seen, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Take shelter immediately.

## RETURNING TO PLAY

*Bylaws 7.9.6 and 7.10.6 – NFHS Recommended Guidelines*

Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or flash of lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30 minute count, the clock should be reset and another 30 minute count should begin.

## ADVANCE PLANNING AND MONITORING

Local managers should have a documented plan in place as well as designated people who are responsible for monitoring the weather and relaying information to contest officials. During the contest local managers should be aware of any potential thunderstorms that may form during competition. Monitoring the weather with electronic lightning detection systems (weather apps - i.e. Weather Bug's Spark function) is recommended.

*\*Note: It is essential that local managers, competing schools and contest officials establish dialogue in advance of contests or events to ensure that all involved understand what the plan will be for determining whether or when to suspend play.*

## OTHER SAFETY GUIDELINES

- ✓ Seek appropriate shelter. The safest shelter is a fully enclosed, substantial building with plumbing, electricity and telephone. The next safest is a fully enclosed vehicle with a metal roof and the windows closed. If play is suspended the fields and stands should be cleared. Local managers should develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safe areas.
- ✓ Avoid being the highest point in an open field, in contact with, or proximity to the highest point. Do not take shelter under or near trees, flagpoles or light poles.
- ✓ Assume the 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.
- ✓ Avoid using land-line telephones except in emergency situations. People have been struck by lightning when using a land-line telephone.
- ✓ People who have been struck by lightning to do not carry an electrical charge. Therefore, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is safe for the responder. Activate local EMS and call 911. If possible, an injured person should be moved to a safer location before starting CPR. Lightning-strike victims who show signs of cardiac arrest or respiratory arrest need emergency help quickly. Prompt, aggressive CPR has been highly effective for the survival of victims of lightning strikes.