

Weather it's Safe to Play?

Don't Strike Out Against Deadly Weather – 'See It, Flee It; Hear It, Clear It' for Lightning; 'Just Cool It' for High Heat

This is the time of year for making improvements to your safety plan. A key component of that effort should be preparing the training for your volunteers on hazardous weather. Take time this off-season to prepare handouts, signs and general weather policies for your league to follow next year when the regular season begins again.

Make it Easy

When storms roll in, do your volunteers know what to do? Rain is not necessarily a reason to stop play. But add lightning to the storm, and even if it isn't raining, you need clear instructions to ALL people to leave your fields and find a safe place to wait until the storm passes or the game is rescheduled.

The quick and easy approach for lightning is "if you see it, flee it; if you hear it, clear it." Lightning can travel up to 10 miles from the storm's edge, so if it is seen or heard, the fields should be cleared and the game paused to wait for the lightning to pass. If lightning is not seen for a reasonable time (usually 30 minutes), the game can continue. Players should be instructed to stay until the game is cancelled, so all players are accounted for while a game is in storm delay.

Have clear instructions for high heat and humidity, too. Playing in the hot sun without water breaks or cool shade for players to escape the sun's heat between defensive innings is a recipe for disaster. Children do not dissipate heat as well as adults do. But you can protect your players from the heat by instituting water breaks, shade covers for dugouts, 5-10 minute breaks between innings and misters/sprinklers/cold cloths to help cool players down. And make sure players are drinking plenty of water or sports drinks *before* they get thirsty.

Take Out the Human Factor

For storms, use electronic detectors, whether those that detect actual lightning strikes (Sky Scan®) or that detect the potential for lightning (Thor-Guard®), to eliminate guesswork; having a sensor allows the umpire to keep his eyes on the game and not the sky. Too many games are played under approaching

storms because an umpire had his back to a lightning strike. Consider purchasing a lightning detector this fall to have a consistent limit to how close lightning gets to your games before the field is cleared.

Waiting for a storm to pass on the field or in an open area around the field(s) is NOT acceptable, especially for players who don't know any better, and your league needs to set expectations that at the least people will wait out the storm in their cars with the windows rolled up. If an enclosed building is large enough for the teams and spectators to go inside to wait, that is even better.

Keep it Posted

Signs posted around your facility are a great way to remind people of what to do in an emergency. When time counts, simple reminders can help everyone follow the correct procedure. It's amazing how parents and players can help remind coaches of the proper response to a weather situation, when they are given the information. Provide handouts of the signs to coaches and other volunteers during their preseason training on safety policies. Make sure your umpires receive the same training and information, as they are the league's agents for proper halting of games in progress.

Follow Your Procedures

No one should be allowed to ignore the warnings of umpires, board members or other authorized league representatives to follow safety procedures. Too much is at stake to allow anyone to not heed warnings, even if they want to take responsibility for doing so. Your league needs to protect people in spite of themselves. You don't allow catchers not to wear their helmets because they don't want to; make sure everyone understands these rules are for their protection and must be followed.

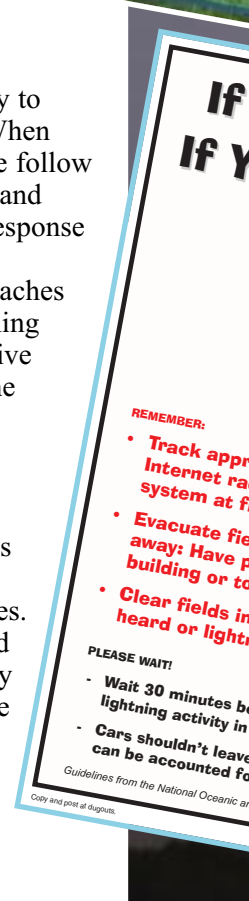
Put up Posters, Signs to Educate About Lightning

NOAA National Weather Service – <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov>

Little League's Lightning Safety – http://www.littleleague.org/Learn_

'See It, Flee It' ASAP Poster, NOAA 'Coaches Guide to Lightning Safety

ASAP Safety Procedures Examples (Requirement 10) – <http://www.littleleague.org>

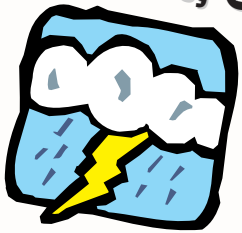


Don't Rely on Experience for Storms

People Routinely Avoid Lightning Strikes, but Lightning Deaths Show Tragedy of This Error



You See It, Flee It;
You Hear It, Clear It



Approaching storms the best way possible:
Check radar websites, dedicated storm warning
apps, field, or other storm warnings

Evacuate fields when storms are about 10 miles
away. Players and spectators go to enclosed
buildings or cars with windows rolled up
immediately after thunder has been
clearly seen!

Do not return to play after last sign of
storm in your area
until the game is called, so all players
are safe.

Adapted from the National Weather Service
and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service

Earlier this year, tragedy struck in Virginia when a Little Leaguer was killed by lightning, and another boy was severely injured. This tragedy underscores what experts know: people cannot use their lifetime of experience in storms as a gauge for their safety. Just because you have never been struck does not mean you cannot be.

Two Little League players in Virginia were injured, one fatally, when they were struck by a lightning bolt while playing catch in early June. According to news reports, the youngsters were playing catch on their league's baseball field after their game had been halted. The fields cleared by the umpires due to the threat of lightning, although no rain was falling at the time of the lightning strike.

Lightning a Top Threat

While this was a huge heartbreak for the Little League family, annually lightning is one of the top weather-related killers of people in the US after heat and flooding. And most of those killed by lightning are just trying to enjoy the outdoors or continue whatever they had been doing. Do you have procedures to avoid a similar tragedy?

In some cases, lightning strikes are catastrophic without being fatal. A Georgia football player was struck and seriously injured by the first reported lightning strike of a local storm on

Aug. 12 in Belleville, Ga. Sheriff Randall Tippins was reported in local news as saying a 14-year-old was in critical condition after being hit by a lightning bolt that came out of nowhere. A defibrillator was used along with CPR by his coaches to resuscitate the player until an ambulance could arrive.

Storms Can Kill

Although recent years have seen reduced fatalities from lightning, according to the National Weather Service in 2009 lightning has claimed 27 victims across the nation to mid-August, many seeking shelter from the storm that killed them. Others were just going about their normal lives:

⚡ In early August, a 53-year-old Pennsylvania man was killed by lightning while trimming bushes in his yard.

⚡ On July 27, a 49-year-old man was killed while jogging on a beach in North Carolina.

⚡ A 14-year-old girl from Minnesota was playing outside in the rain in her front yard when she was hit and killed by lightning on July 21.

⚡ Others were doing yard work, taking out the trash, walking, clearing brush, golfing, fishing and playing soccer.

Remind people in your league that lightning can kill, no matter how lucky they have been in the past in avoiding it.

Lightning, Heat Risks – Follow these links to the examples above and some other top lightning and heat injury info online:

NOAA Watch (formerly StormWatch) – <http://www.noaawatch.gov/>

Learn More/programs/asap/lightning.htm

'Safety,' or 'Drink Before You're Thirsty' ASAP Poster – http://www.littleleague.org/Learn_More/programs/asap/safetyposters.htm

http://www.littleleague.org/Learn_More/programs/asap/SafetyRequirementsExplained.htm