Lightning Safety
Lightning Facts

• Lightning is dangerous—(obvious)
  – often overlooked as sports risk
• Second leading cause of weather-related deaths in U.S.
• Kills over 100 people each year
• Severely injures hundreds more
• Sports associations & officials need to have a plan in place
Why Overlooked in Planning for Risks?

- **Unpredictable**—don’t know when/where will strike
- **Uncontrollable**—can’t stop lightning, so feel powerless to avoid danger
- **Uninformed**—ignorance is bliss
- **Unnecessary pressure**—participants “little rain won’t hurt” (uninformed)
  - important game
  - close score
  - fear of being second guessed
Contest Officials Must Make the Hard Calls

- Participants are responsible for their own safety
- But, officials play an important role in minimizing risks
Keys to Making Safe Calls

1. Get EDUCATED—learn about the risks and inform other participants

2. Make a PLAN—know what to do BEFORE risk presents

3. Keep it in PERSPECTIVE—put safety above all else—IT’S JUST A GAME
Action Plan

• Develop a plan ahead of time and stick to it
• The plan should apply to all activities—warm up, practice, game

Include details about:
• Who is in charge
• When to stop play
• Where to go
• When to resume play
WHO IS IN CHARGE?

- Establish chain of command with one person designated to watch weather (may be contest official or game manager, but decide in advance)

**Person in charge:**
- Observe / be aware of conditions at all times
- Monitor the forecast / Nat’l Weather Service warnings, watches
- Stop play if dangerous conditions exist
- Remove participants from field
- Warn spectators to seek shelter
- Provide information on shelter
- Keep participants informed so they can make responsible decisions
When to Stop Play?

- Use common sense / good judgment
- Put SAFETY FIRST
- Postpone / suspend if thunderstorm appears imminent
  - Darkening clouds
  - High winds
  - Sudden increase in humidity
- Lightning can strike miles from storm and first strike can be deadly
- May need to suspend even BEFORE first sight of lightning / sound of thunder
- Listen to participants—are they concerned?
- Individuals should not face repercussions or penalty if they leave to seek shelter
Where to Go?

• No place is absolutely safe
• Some places are better than others
  – Large, enclosed structures (plumbing, electrical wiring, phone lines)
  – Vehicle—not first choice, but can be reasonable alternative IF
    ➢ Metal roof
    ➢ Fully enclosed
    ➢ Avoid metal surfaces within car
    ➢ Not golf cart or convertible
• Areas of high elevation
• Wide open areas (contest fields)
• Tall, isolated objects (trees, poles)
• Metal fences / bleachers
• Unprotected buildings—dugouts, picnic pavilions, rain shelters, bus stops
When to Resume Play?

- Wait AT LEAST 30 minutes after last lightning seen or thunder heard
- If at minute 25, see / hear more activity, start the count over
- Do NOT rely on clear sky, lack of rainfall
When to Resume Play?

- Even if storm moved on, lightning risk may remain because storm can be miles from lightning
- Do not shorten the 30 minute rule
- Do not resume play if any threat remains