



To: NJSIAA Program Review Committee

From: Tony Maselli, Chief Operating Officer

Date: March 27, 2023

RE: Procedure in the Event of Thunder or Lightning

NJSIAA staff proposes to amend the existing “Procedure in the Event of Lightning” (Pages 36-37 of NJSIAA Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures) to make the policy more easily understood, and to highlight the specific procedure that administrators and officials must abide by in the event of lightning or thunder. One important proposed addition is to provide guidance on the postponement if lightning or thunder persists 75 minutes after the onset of the delay, except for football which the host school site management shall determine how long to delay the game before it is postponed.

PROPOSED GUIDELINES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES AMENDMENT

[The existing “Procedure in the Event of Lightning” shall be replaced with the following.]

PROCEDURE IN THE EVENT OF THUNDER OR LIGHTNING

All coaches and officials should monitor the weather report on game day. The protocol below details the steps to be followed in the event of lightning and/or thunder at outdoor events. If the host school has a more stringent policy, including those schools with lightning detection systems, that policy shall be adhered to. This policy should be reviewed annually with all administrators, coaches, and game personnel.

Every school should develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safer areas, and should determine the amount of time needed to get everyone to a designated safer area. A designated safer area is a substantial building with plumbing and wiring where people live or work, such as a school, gymnasium, or library. An alternate safer place from the threat of lightning is a fully enclosed (not convertible or soft top) metal car or school bus.

If severe weather strikes prior to the beginning of the event, host school site management shall be the decision-maker regarding the policy. If it occurs once the event has begun, the lead game official shall be the decision-maker.

When one contest is suspended on a site due to thunder or lightning, all outdoor contests/activities on that site must be suspended.

When caught in a thunderstorm without the availability or time to reach a safe structure, the risk of injury may be minimized by seeking low ground and avoiding contact with anything made of metal. Avoid bleachers, metal fences, and standing pools of water.

Guidelines for schools when thunder is heard, or lightning is seen:

Mandatory

1. Suspend play, or delay the commencement of the contest, for 30 minutes. All participants and spectators shall vacate the outdoor venue to a designated safer area immediately.
 - a. A list of the closest safer areas should be announced and displayed at all outdoor venues.
 - b. Clear instructions should be announced over the public address system (if available) to guide participants and spectators to safer areas.
2. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play.
3. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30-minute count will reset the clock and another 30-minute count shall begin.
 - a. If, for example, the contest is suspended at 7:00 p.m. due to a lightning strike, and then lightning is witnessed again at 7:25 p.m., the earliest the contest may resume is 7:55 p.m.

Voluntary Guidelines

4. If the thunder or lightning persists, and access to the field for warmups cannot resume 75 minutes after the initial suspension of play, the contest shall be postponed to a later date. If participants can safely return to the field of play within 75 minutes, the players shall participate in a brief workout period, and the contest shall resume.
 - a. Athletic Administrators, Coaches & Officials may agree to alter #4 if all agree.
 - b. If an agreement on how long to wait cannot be reached, then #4 will be used.
5. For Football only, the host school site management shall determine how long to suspend the game before it is postponed.