

Lightning Safety for Athletics – update 4/22/20

Purpose

The keys to lightning safety are education and prevention. Education begins with learning appropriate lightning safety tips. Prevention of lightning injuries or casualties should begin before any athletic event. This policy will outline lightning safety procedures and decision-making policies.

Monitoring Weather Conditions

- a. Athletics personnel (Certified Athletic Trainers, Game Administrator, and coaches) will check/monitor weather conditions for any outdoor athletic event as related to the potential of severe weather. The National Weather Service (NWS) issues severe weather and/or thunderstorm watches and/or warnings. A “watch” means conditions are favorable for severe weather to develop in particular area. A “warning” means the NWS has reported severe weather in an area and for anyone in that area to take the necessary precautions.
- b. Athletics personnel should be aware of the signs of thunderstorms developing nearby. Thunderstorms can grow from towering, “fluffy” cumulus clouds to lightning producers in as little as (30) thirty minutes. Lightning and thunder activity in the local area are the “alarms” for athletics personnel to begin monitoring thunderstorm activity, such as directions of storm movement and distance to the lightning flashes.

Evacuation

- a. WEATHER SENTRY Powered by DTN Weather Prediction and Warning System
 1. For outdoor athletic events on the Bixby High School campus, the WEATHER SENTRY system will determine site evacuation and event continuation.
 2. During situations of arriving inclement weather, the Certified Athletic Trainer or athletics administrator will be assigned to follow and assess the situation using the WEATHER SENTRY system and weather radar from their website.
 3. Bixby has set lightning distance parameters on the WEATHER SENTRY system. 30 miles indicates a storm in the area. 20 miles indicates potential storm impending. 10 miles indicates immediate evacuation and lightning safety procedures taken. The 10-mile parameter is the distance used for stadium and safety evacuation plans to be instructed. The lightning progress can be tracked and followed on the Athletic Trainers computer in the Home of the Spartans Athletic Training Room. Every time a lightning strike hits within each distance parameter, it restarts the 30-minute clock.
 4. Events are not to begin under any conditions until the WEATHER SENTRY system has issued an “All Clear” alert. These alerts will come in text form to the phones of the Athletic Trainers and athletics administrators.
 5. Athletic Trainers and athletics administration will use the WEATHER SENTRY system as their number one safety method. The Flash-To-Bang Method will not override the WEATHER SENTRY if the WEATHER SENTRY system is available for use at the event or practice.
- b. Flash-to-Bang Method (only if WEATHER SENTRY is not available. Will not be used to replace WEATHER SENTRY)
 1. The Flash-to-Bang Method should be utilized at all off-campus events in the case there is lightning.
 2. To use Flash-to-Bang Time, count the seconds from the time lightning is sighted to when the clap of thunder is heard. Divide this number by five (5) to obtain how far away (in miles) the lightning is occurring. (Ex. 30 sec. count / 5 = 6-mile distance)
 3. A Flash to Bang Time of thirty (30) seconds or less dictates the immediate suspension of practice/events and evacuation of all athletes and spectators to a safe area. (This is equivalent to 6 miles or less.) Once it has been decided to stop an athletic practice/event, all persons involved will wait at least thirty (30) minutes after all lightning and thunder activity has ceased before resuming any athletics activity.

- c. Event/Activity stoppage when utilizing the Flash-To-Bang method
 - 1. Only the Certified Athletic Trainer, coach, or administrator will make the decision to stop athletic events or practice. The decision regarding stoppage of play of an official game or contest is the decision of the Certified Athletic Trainer and/or coach after consulting with game administrators and officials.
 - 2. All coaches, officials, and administrators need to abide by this to ensure the safety of all athletes, coaches, support staff, spectators, and all others who may be present.
 - ***Important to note, clear blue skies and no rain are not protection from lightning. Lightning can strike from a distance as far as 10 miles.**
- d. Safe shelter areas include:
 - Fully enclosed buildings
 - Fully enclosed metal vehicles with a hard metal roof and windows up
 - Low ground areas as a last resort (ditches, bottom of hill) – assume a crouched position – minimize your body surface area but do not lie flat
 Unsafe areas include:
 - Open fields
 - Golf carts/gators
 - Metal bleachers (on or under)
 - Fences
 - Umbrellas, flag poles, light poles
 - Tall trees
 - Pools of standing water
 - Baseball/softball dugouts
- e. Bixby safe areas for athletics teams, staff, personnel, administrators, officials, and spectators include:
 - Home of the Spartans
 - Lee Snider Stadium visitor locker room
 - Multipurpose Building
 - New and Old Whitey Gyms
 - Practice Gym
 - Baseball/softball indoor facility
 - Powerhouse weight room

In the event of lightning at an official game, the announcer should immediately be notified to announce to all spectators to leave the area and to seek shelter in one of the aforementioned safe areas until such time that it is safe to return or the competition is postponed or cancelled.

Resumption of Athletic Activities

The 30-30 Lightning Safety Rule when utilizing the Flash-To-Bang method

- a. Resumption of play can continue only when lightning or thunder has not been detected for 30 minutes. Every time lightning or thunder is detected within 30 minutes, the clock restarts.
- b. A typical thunderstorm can travel up to 30mph. Experts believe 30 minutes allows for thunderstorms to be about 10-12 miles from the area. This minimizes the probability of a nearby and dangerous lightning strike.
- c. Evidence of blue skies in the local area or a lack of rainfall are not adequate reasons to breach the thirty-minute return to play rule. Lightning can strike far from where it is raining, even when the clouds begin to clear and show evidence of a blue sky.
- d. The return of athletics teams, staff, personnel, administrators, officials, and spectators will be permitted once clearance has been verified by the Certified Athletic Trainer, coach, administrator, and/or game official.

Emergency Action Plan

If an athlete, coach, administrator, official or spectator is struck by lightning, the following protocol will be executed:

- a. Any person struck by lightning does not carry an electrical charge – there is no danger presented to the healthcare provider.
- b. Assess the scene to ensure safety for a qualified health care personnel to enter. This may include transporting the victim to a safe environment before initiating first aid procedures.
- c. A Certified Athletic Trainer or Physicians will evaluate the victim, instruct a coach or other staff member to activate Emergency Medical Services, and provide necessary first aid, which may include CPR and rescue breathing
- d. In the event a Certified Athletic Trainer is not present, a coach, athletics administrator or staff member should activate the Emergency Action Plan

*Note: The policy serves only as a guideline for situations involving the presence of lightning at a Bixby athletic event and may be altered at any time as seen appropriate by school officials.