

MEMO

To: Chair, State Referee Committee
State Referee Administrators
State Directors of Referee Instruction
State Directors of Referee Assessment
National Referees, Assessors, and Instructors

cc: State Presidents
State Assoc. Exec. Dir.
State Assoc. Office Mgrs.
Daniel T. Flynn
Julie Ilacqua

From: Alfred Kleinaitis, Manager of Referee Development and Education

Re: Player Safety: Guidelines on Dealing With the Threat of Lightning

Date: August xx, 2002

Lightning Occurrence

In the United States, there are an estimated 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes each year. While lightning can be fascinating to watch, it is also extremely dangerous. During the past 30 years, lightning killed an average of 93 people per year in the United States, based on documented cases. While documented lightning injuries in the United States average about 300 per year, undocumented injuries caused by lightning are likely much higher. Only about 10 percent of those struck are killed; 90 percent survive. But of the survivors, the large majority suffers life-long severe injury. The greatest number of lightning deaths and injuries in the United States occurs during the summer months when the combination of lightning and outdoor summertime activities reaches a peak.

Minimizing The Risk Of Being Struck

Referees must protect the safety of all participants by stopping the activities as soon as possible, so that the participants and spectators can get to a safe place before the lightning threat becomes significant. If you can hear the thunder from a storm, you are within striking distance.

Guidelines:

Referees should be aware of certain basic safety guidelines for dealing with the threat of lightning.

1. A referee cannot be held liable for deciding that the weather conditions are such as to allow or not to allow a match to take place, nor for a decision to abandon a match for whatever reason.
2. The referee must be familiar with the rules for dealing with lightning established by the competition and the facility authority.

3. There may be “higher authority,” within which the referee may be more, but not less, restrictive.
4. The referee should use common sense.
 - a. Suspend play for a reasonable and fixed amount of time.
 - b. Announce the time to both teams
 - c. If the storm has not passed at the end of that time, terminate the game.
 - d. Include full details in the match report.
5. Follow the “30-30 Rule”

When you see lightning, count the time until you hear thunder. If this time is 30 seconds or less, seek proper shelter. If you can't see the lightning, just hearing the thunder is a good back-up rule. Wait 30 minutes or more after hearing the last thunder before leaving shelter.

Proper Shelter

Seek proper shelter when required. Do not hesitate, seek shelter immediately. The best shelter commonly available against lightning is a large fully-enclosed substantially constructed building. If you can't get to a building or house, a vehicle with a solid metal roof and metal sides is a reasonable second choice. MYTH: Cars are safe because the rubber tires insulate them from the ground. TRUTH: Cars are safe because of their metal shell.

No Proper Shelter

If you can't get to proper lightning shelter, at least avoid the most dangerous locations and activities. Avoid higher elevations. Avoid wide-open areas, including sports fields. Avoid tall isolated objects like trees, poles, and light posts. Avoid unprotected open buildings like picnic pavilions, rain shelters, and bus stops. Avoid metal fences and metal bleachers. Radial horizontal arcing has been measured at least 60 feet (20 m.) from the point where lightning enters the earth. Crouch down on the balls of your feet, with your head tucked into your chest and your hands over your ears.

If Someone is Hit

CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation are the recommended first aid measures for cardiac arrest and stopped breathing, respectively.