



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

From: Alfred Kleinaitis
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Re: Dealing with Severe Weather

Date: April 6, 2005

This position paper provides basic guidelines for dealing with lightning, windstorms, and other severe weather conditions. (This paper supersedes the paper dated September 23, 2003, on the same topic.) The peak season for severe weather occurs in the United States between May and August, typically in the late afternoon and early evening. Before taking any of the actions outlined in sections 1 (Lightning) or 2 (Other types of severe weather), you must consider the instructions in the following paragraph:

Many stadium operators, park districts, and school districts have acquired and installed **advanced technology that can aid the referee in making decisions about weather conditions**. If there is any indication that severe weather may occur, check with the appropriate authorities (field or park manager, athletic director, stadium operations personnel, city or county parks or education departments, etc.) for the latest information before making any decisions. Also check with these authorities during any weather-related interruption, as the new technology may allow you to restart earlier than indicated after a stoppage. It is not necessary to wait thirty (30) minutes when this assistance is available.

1. Lightning

- a. Recognizing the threat
 - (1) Apply 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.
 - (2) Know and heed warning systems and community rules
Many communities or park systems have lightning detection and warning systems. Use this information and obey the rules established by the community or park system.
 - (3) Know and apply the rules or procedures established by the competition authority
 - (4) Minimize the risk of being struck
Protect the safety of all participants by stopping game activities quickly, so that participants and spectators may retire to a safer place before the lightning threat becomes significant. Remember, if you can hear the thunder, you are within reach of lightning.
- b. Seeking proper shelter
 - (1) No place outside is safe near thunderstorms
 - (2) The best shelter is a large, fully enclosed, substantially constructed building. A vehicle with a solid metal roof and metal sides is a reasonable second choice.
- c. If there is no proper shelter, **avoid** the most dangerous locations: Higher elevations; wide open areas, including fields; tall isolated objects, such as trees, poles, or light posts; unprotected open buildings; rain shelters; bus stops; metal fences and metal bleachers.

- d. If you cannot avoid these locations, 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, remember that all deaths from lightning result from cardiac arrest and stopped breathing. CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, respectively, are the recommended first aid. Referees should become involved in such assistance only if they have proper training.
- e. Remain calm. A calm official will often be able to prevent panic by young players.

2. Other types of severe weather

For all other types of severe storms, such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and hail, obey local rules and heed warnings. Clear the field and seek proper shelter immediately – see above. Remember, according to standard weather warning terminology a "*warning*" represents a more immediately likely occurrence than a "*watch*."

NO SEVERE WEATHER SAFETY GUIDELINES WILL GIVE 100% GUARANTEED TOTAL SAFETY, BUT THESE STEPS WILL HELP YOU AVOID THE VAST MAJORITY OF CASUALTIES.

If there is a possibility of severe weather, the referee and assistant referees should discuss these guidelines in their pregame meeting and ensure that all officials have a clear understanding of their respective duties. Referees in particular should clearly identify what assistance they expect in detecting and bringing to their immediate attention any dangerous weather conditions which may not be directly visible to them. If such conditions develop only after a match has begun, the referee should take the first stoppage opportunity to quickly review these matters with the assistant referees. A brief word to the coaches regarding steps the referee will take to ensure player safety in threatening weather conditions would be useful.