

**TOPIC: Severe Weather and Lightning
Emergency Planning**

ISSUE

Programs such as golf, aquatics, day camp, softball and soccer leagues have an inherent weather-related risk. For these programs, it is a good idea to have your pre-season emergency response plan reviewed by staff and your Safety Committee.

PDRMA members' loss experience reveals that lightning is the predominant threat in weather –related incidents. On more than one occasion a patron or volunteer was tragically struck and killed by lightning as they were leaving a program.

In the past, golfers on a member's course have been struck by lightning and injured. Often, golfers will choose to ignore warnings or take shelter in unprotected areas such as under tall, single trees. Also, special events have been disrupted by inclement weather.

The questions which we should all address and answer are:

1. Does my agency have a **specific** weather emergency response plan for outdoor activities?
2. Have we trained our individual staffs on its contents?

ACTION

Emergency Response Planning

A site-specific emergency plan should be made for each outdoor program or site. Agency golf courses, aquatic facilities, baseball/soccer league locations, and day camp or preschool sites should all have an emergency plan. The response plan should be customized. For example, Camp Sunshine may have a building adjacent to its camp for an emergency shelter; as opposed to Camp Fun that is located at the edge of your district in an open field.

With "specifics" playing a key part to each program's emergency response needs, the following components should be considered when developing a site specific outdoor emergency response plan:

Training/Education – Staff training should be conducted during orientation and patrons should be educated as to the policies for cancellation/relocation and suspension of programs in the event of severe weather. For example, golf course starter and ranger safety orientations should include covering emergency weather evacuation procedures, such as clearing the course. Posters, flyers and information on scorecards can assist in educating the public to the dangers of lightning and your emergency response plan. Leagues can be provided information along with their contracts. Both of these steps can assist in an orderly evacuation of the course in an emergency situation.

Severe Weather Lightning Emergency Planning Golf Course Page 2 – Continued

Monitoring – Although severe weather can occur without warning, the National Weather Service has made dramatic steps over the years in predicting weather and issuing “watches and warnings” for emergency weather situations. Agencies should monitor changing weather conditions to determine the need for relocation, suspension or cancellation of outdoor programming. This can be accomplished through:

- Listening to weather forecasts/cable Weather Channel.
- Purchasing weather radios.
- Purchase of lightning detection systems.
- Visually monitoring the changing weather conditions.
- Any combination of the above.

Emergency plans should address a “severe weather watch” (conditions exist which severe weather is likely), and a “severe weather warning” (emergency weather is imminent and shelter should be taken immediately).

“WATCH” Members should consider relocation or suspension of activities based upon the threat until severe weather has passed. In many areas adequate shelter may not be available to meet the volume of patrons, especially if the majority are minors. Strong consideration towards rescheduling or suspension of the activity should be made.

“WARNING” Member should **immediately** inform patrons of the imminent danger and assist them in seeking appropriate shelter. Members should consider the means in which the “warning” would be made.

Communications – Once an agency knows of potentially hazardous weather, the information needs to be conveyed to those who may be affected. It is equally important that if a problem exists at a remote site, those personnel need to be quickly contacted. Some type of communication (i.e., cellular phone, two-way radio, pay phone, power megaphone, air horns, etc.) should be available for emergency communications.

Whenever lightning is observed or thunder heard, patrons should be informed of the weather conditions and outdoor programming should be suspended for a period of no less than thirty minutes after the last lightning is observed or thunder heard. For example at a golf course, a siren or boat horn can be used to inform patrons of an emergency and to evacuate the course. This is the model plan adopted by the United States Golf Association (USGA). For a special event or ball field complex, a P.A. system or bullhorn can be used to inform participants of the need to evacuate.

Shelter – Another often overlooked aspect to the emergency response plan is where persons will be instructed to seek shelter. For example, a day camp that meets at a remote park facility could possibly not have an adequate shelter area for all patrons. The same may be true of an aquatic facility with a large patron bather load. In both situations, it is important that either alternate shelter locations be designated or that the early warning procedures be enforced even more strictly so that participants and staff are not trapped without shelter. In the event of a severe weather situation, it is recommended that minors not be sent home without parents or guardians.

Transportation – Based upon site specific needs, transportation may need to be part of your emergency plan. It may be appropriate to send an agency van or bus to transport a group located at a remote site in

Severe Weather Lightning Emergency Planning Golf Course
Page 3 – Continued

advance of the oncoming severe weather. However, it must be cautioned that this must be done only when sufficient time exists to complete the transport well in advance of the approaching weather.

Follow-up – As with any procedure, it is important that your emergency plan be reviewed on an ongoing basis. If a member implements its emergency plan, a review of any incidents and how the plan was handled by staff is necessary. Changes can then be made to improve the plan. During any emergency situation, consult your agency's crisis management plan to address media and personnel needs.

SAMPLE GOLF COURSE SEVERE WEATHER AND LIGHTNING WARNING POLICY

It is the policy of the (**Agency**) that if a storm has been forecast or the weather is looking threatening, designated employees will monitor the **weather radio and/or watch the television (Doppler Radar)** for any weather warnings. If a “severe weather warning” (severe weather is imminent and shelter should be taken immediately) is broadcast and/or **lightning has been spotted or thunder heard, the course is to be cleared immediately**. The following procedures and guidelines will be followed by the staff:

- Blow the emergency horn one prolonged blast to notify the golfers that the course is to be cleared. This is the warning system established by the United States Golf Association.
- Clubhouse staff and rangers are not to go out onto the golf course to clear patrons. If rangers are already on the course, they should notify all patrons they encounter on the way back to the clubhouse to discontinue play and seek shelter. To assist with this process, rangers shall be given a boat horn.
- Upon hearing the horn, all maintenance staff are to return to the clubhouse or maintenance building immediately. They should inform all patrons they encounter to discontinue play and seek shelter.
- Play should be suspended for a period of thirty minutes from the last flash of lightning or sound of thunder. To resume play, one prolonged note of the horn should be sounded.
- At the time of suspended play, the course is officially closed and no golfers shall be permitted to tee off.

Notice of the emergency weather alert system should be posted in the clubhouse, the halfway house, and, if possible, on the scorecard at the first tee.

In case of a tournament:

The U.S.G.A. emphasizes that players should be made aware that they have the right to stop play if they think lightning threatens them, even though the committee may not have specifically authorized it by signal (rules 6-8 and 32-2D).

SAMPLE SEVERE WEATHER AND LIGHTNING POLICY

Lightning is a violent act of nature and causes approximately 10 deaths per year in Illinois alone. In most instances, people injured by lightning are not directly hit. These non-direct hit injuries are caused by transients, currents that flow through people in the vicinity of lightning strikes to the ground. Lightning strikes occur most frequently during the spring and summer months when thunder storms are prevalent. It is the policy of the (**Agency**) that all persons supervising outdoor activities be aware that when lightning or thunder is observed or heard, outdoor programs should be suspended and everyone should seek appropriate shelter. Supervisors should adhere to the following procedures and guidelines:

Outdoor Program:

- Instructors and supervisors should listen to current weather forecasts the morning of any outdoor planned activities so that employees can be alert to changing weather conditions.
- Monitor weather conditions as they appear on the horizon.
- Monitor weather radios when possible.
- Designate buildings that can be used when severe weather occurs.
- Plan alternative indoor activities for camps and related programs.
- **Whenever lightning is observed or thunder is audible, all outdoor activities should be suspended for a minimum of 30 minutes after the last sign of lightning or thunder is noted.**

When Outside:

- Avoid areas that are higher than the surrounding landscape;
- Do not use a tree for shelter;
- Keep away from metal objects, including bicycles, golf carts, umbrellas, etc.;
- Avoid standing near tall or metal objects such as fences, light poles, or power lines;
- Boaters and swimmers should immediately leave the water and find shelter;
- If you feel your skin tingle or your hair stand on end, squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands on your knees with your head between them. Make yourself as small as possible target and minimize your contact with the ground.

When Indoors:

- When indoors, stand clear from doors and windows;
- Do not use electrical equipment, including hair dryers, curling irons, computers, etc.;
- Do not attempt to unplug TVs, stereos, or computers during a storm;
- Avoid contact with sinks, faucets, and related piping;
- Do not use the telephone unless for emergency use;
- Indoor pool swimmers should immediately leave the water and seek shelter away from pool deck.