

Lightning Policy

Lightning presents a real risk of death or serious injury to outdoor sports participants. It accounts for around 10 deaths and over 100 injuries in Australia each year. Lightning does not need to directly strike a person to cause death or serious injury. A person touching, or close to, an object struck by lightning may be affected by a side-flash or transferred energy (for example, being within 20m of a tree struck by lightning is considered to be in the lethal zone).

Participants must not let the desire to start or complete a match or training session hinder their judgment when the safety of players, coaches or spectators is at risk.

Precautions

The threat to personal safety is greatest if a person is outdoors when a thunderstorm is local. Experts consider that a safe distance from lightning is more than 10km. Therefore, when lightning is within 10km, appropriate shelter should be sought. In the absence of specific information from a weather radar or specialised lightning warning device, the 30/30 Guideline (described in further detail below) should be used.

Note that lightning may be obscured by clouds. If thunder is heard, you should assume lightning is in the vicinity. Similarly, just because there are blue skies overhead, does not mean that the danger has passed. Careful judgment must always be used to determine whether a threat exists. If in doubt, stop outdoor activities and seek safety under an appropriate shelter.

The 30/30 Lightning Safety Guideline

The 30/30 Guideline has two parts. The first part deals with when participants should stop outdoor activity and seek protection under an appropriate shelter. The second part deals with when it is safe to return to outdoor activities.

Part 1 – Stop the activity

If the time between seeing a lightning flash and hearing a thunder clap is less than 30 seconds, the thunderstorm is within 10km (as sound travels at approximately 340m per second). Stop all outdoor activity immediately and seek appropriate shelter indoors (such as in a solid building or totally enclosed car). Do not seek shelter under a tree (or group of trees) in the open or in small open structures such as picnic shelters.

Part 2 – When it is safe to resume the activity

You should wait a minimum of 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder is heard before resuming outdoor activities.

Further detail for clubs, Associations and event organisers on dealing with the risk of lightning strikes is set out below. In addition, it is suggested that clubs, Associations and event organisers comply with the Australian Lightning Standard (AS1768-2007) published on 10 January 2007 (Lightning Standard). While compliance with the Lightning Standard will not necessarily prevent damage or personal injury due to lightning, it will reduce the probability of such damage or injury occurring. This policy has been developed with reference to the Lightning Standard Section 3 'Precautions for Personal Safety'.

Prior to Match Days, Training and Events

The following checks should be made prior to Match Days, training activities and outdoor events:

1. Check weather forecasts for likely thunderstorms on the BOM website www.bom.gov.au;
2. Where thunderstorm activity is forecast, clubs, Associations and event organisers should continue to monitor forecasts in the days and hours leading up to the event and take note of any warnings posted.
3. Consider informing participants ahead of the event that it may be disrupted due to lightning risk.

Match Days, Tournaments and Outdoor Events

1. When engaged in outdoor activities, monitor the surroundings for indications of the onset of thunderstorms. These checks are particularly important when planning and undertaking activities involving groups and large numbers of people.
2. Where there is a forecast or sighting of thunderstorm activity, increased awareness and monitoring of lightning risk should continue until the event has finished.
3. If lightning is predicted within 10km of the event venue at the scheduled starting time, consideration may be given to delaying commencement time of the match or event.
4. The decision to delay or suspend a match as well as resume play will be made by the Match Official based on (a) information obtained from the BOM website and discussions with club officials; or (b) application of the 30/30 Guideline.
5. The decision to delay or suspend a Tournament or outdoor event or activity as well as resume activities will be made by the event organiser based on (a) information obtained from the BOM website and discussion with event and/or match officials; or (b) application of the 30/30 Guideline.

Club Training and Activities

All Clubs should monitor environmental factors such as lightning both in matches and at any training session or other event at or conducted by the club. Clubs should assess the lightning risk by reviewing information available on the BOM website.

The following general guidelines should also be followed:

1. If a lightning threat emerges, a nominated Club Official must contact all relevant coaching

and training officials and provide updates on a regular basis and ensure that they are aware of the 30/30 Guideline.

2. A decision to delay, suspend or resume training or activity should be made based on the 30/30 Guideline.

3. If players are training when a lightning threat becomes real then they should stop training immediately and take shelter inside a building or car. They should not shelter under or near trees, open shelters, fences, light poles, metal poles or umbrellas. They should not use umbrellas or mobile phones.

4. Once the storm's path has been reassessed, there must be a minimum of 30 minutes elapsed before returning to training or other outdoor activities (as required by the 30/30 Guideline).

Safety measures

When outdoors, measures to reduce the risk of injury caused by lightning strikes include the following:

1. Seek shelter in a substantial building with at least normal headroom or within a totally enclosed, metal bodied vehicle such as car or truck with metallic roof. If in a car, close the windows and avoid contact with metallic parts and remove any hands-free mobile telephone attachments from the body. Conventional fabric shelters and tents offer no protection; small sheds offer uncertain protection.

2. Do not shelter under trees, particularly an isolated tree. If surrounded by trees, seek a position outside the foliage and crouch, keeping the feet together.

3. Do not shelter in small sheds, pagodas, walkways etc. with low unearthed metallic roofs supported on wooden or other electrically insulating materials.

4. Do not touch or stand close to any metallic structures, including wire fences, light towers, or goalposts.

5. Do not stand on or under bridges or other elevated structures.

6. Do not carry metallic objects such as umbrellas or golf clubs and remove metallic chains and other jewellery, particularly from the head and upper parts of the body.

7. If on an open field away from any shelters, keep as low and as small as possible, i.e. crouch keeping the feet together and do not touch any objects or people near you. A dry ditch, valley or any depression in the ground is safer than an elevated or flat terrain. Do not lie on the ground as dangerous voltage could develop across the body by earth currents generated by a nearby strike. Footwear or a layer of non-absorbing, insulating material, such as plastic sheets, can offer some protection against earth voltages.

8. Do not ride or sit on bicycles or motorcycles, or otherwise elevate the body above the surroundings.