

Valdosta State University Athletic Department Lightning Safety Policy

Lightning is a dangerous phenomenon. Athletic teams that practice and compete outdoors are at risk when the weather is inclement. The Athletic Training staff has developed a lightning safety policy to minimize the risk of injury from a lightning strike to Valdosta State University athletes, coaches, support staff and the fans. To monitor lightning the Athletic Training staff will utilize both the Flash-Bang method AND a Lightning Detector. Our policy is in accordance to the NCAA recommendations regarding lightning safety.

GENERAL POLICY: A member of the Athletic Training Staff (certified or student staff) will monitor the weather and make the decision to suspend activity in the event of imminent lightning. Exceptions will be made for golf and cross country, whereby the head coach will have the ability to suspend activity in the absence of a member of the Athletic Training staff. The decision to suspend activity will be based on:

Two subsequent readings on the Lightning Detector in the 8-20 mile range regardless of the presence of visible lightning. (This device is portable and will be in the possession of the athletic training staff member.)

Lightning strikes within a 20 mile radius on the Storm Hawk. An ATC will track the storm using the Storm Hawk looking for speed, direction, intensity, and communication will take place with the three athletic training facilities on when to suspend activity for VSU athletics.

and/or

Utilization of the Flash-Bang method revealing lightning within 6 miles (a 30 second or less count between the flash of lightning and the bang of thunder).

PRIOR TO COMPETITION: A member of the Athletic Training staff will greet the officials, explain that we have a means to monitor the lightning, and offer to notify the officials during the game if there is imminent danger from the lightning.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUSPENSION OF ACTIVITY: Once it is determined that there is danger of a lightning strike, the Athletic Training staff member will notify the head coach and or official and subsequently (via horn/whistle, or verbally) summon athletes from the playing field or court.

EVACUATION OF THE PLAYING FIELD: Immediately following the announcement of suspension of activity all, athletes, coaches, officials and support personnel are to evacuate to an enclosed grounded structure.

If you are unable to reach shelter immediately, seek a flat area (do not choose an open area where you will be the highest object) or a ditch without water, crouch down wrapping your arms around your knees, lower your head and wait for the storm to pass.

REMEMBER: an automobile, golf cart, or open shelter may not protect you from a lightning strike so these are not adequate shelters.

At VSU

Football Practice: Evacuate to the Old Gym or PE Complex

Football Practice (North Campus): Evacuate to the ROTC building

Football Game: Evacuate to the locker room

Tennis Game or Practice: Evacuate to PE Complex

Softball Game or Practice: Evacuate to Baseball Fieldhouse (Alternate site is press box)

Baseball Game or Practice: Evacuate to Baseball Fieldhouse

Cross Country Race or Practice: Suitable Structure, ditch without water, group of trees*

Golf Match or Practice: Clubhouse, restroom, ditch without water, group of trees*

Golfers: Drop your golf clubs. Metal conducts electricity.

*Athletes should not stand in groups or near a single tree. There should be 15 ft between athletes. (NLSI, 2000)

Away Events: A member of the Athletic Training Staff will discuss emergency procedures and emergency shelter with the home team athletic trainer and report this information to the coaches and team.

EVACUATION OF THE STANDS: During a competition once the official signals to suspend activity, a member of the Sports Information staff will announce via the PA system: 1) Fans are advised to immediately seek shelter in an enclosed grounded shelter, 2) REMEMBER: an automobile, golf cart, or open-sided shelter may not protect you from a lightning strike so these are not adequate shelters.

RESUMPTION OF ACTIVITY: Activity may resume once a member of the Athletic Training staff gives permission. This decision will be based on:

Two consecutive readings of lightning strikes 20-40 miles away on the Lightning detector Lightning Detector.

Thirty minutes AFTER the last lightning strike within a 6-mile range using the Flash-Bang method.

Storm Hawk readings indicating that the storm has passed.

OTHER LIGHTNING SAFETY TIPS:

1. There should be no contact with metal objects (bleachers, fences, golf clubs, bats)
2. Single trees and standing in a group should be avoided.
3. If there is no other shelter you may seek refuge in a hardtop vehicle. It is not the rubber tires that protect from lightning; it is the hard top metal roof that dissipates the lightning around the vehicle. (NCAA, 1999)
4. The existence of blue skies and/or absence of rain are not protection from lightning. Lightning can strike 10 miles from the rain shaft. (NCAA, 1999)
5. **DO NOT LIE FLAT ON THE GROUND**
6. Avoid using a land line telephone.
7. Persons who have been struck by lightning do not carry an electrical charge. Therefore, you can provide care. CPR is what is most often required. Be sure to move the victim to a safe location.
8. If in a forest, seek shelter in a low area under a thick grove of small trees.

SCRIPT FOR CONVERSATION WITH OFFICIAL

Hello, my name is _____. I am a member of the Valdosta State University Athletic Training Staff. I would like to speak with you regarding our lightning safety procedures. On site we have a lightning detector and/or a Storm Hawk GPS weather system which I will use to monitor lightning. In accordance to NCAA recommendations, lightning detected within 8-20 miles is considered to pose an imminent threat. Per VSU's lightning safety policy, when the lightning detector reveals 2 consecutive strikes within the 8-20 mile range OR the flash/bang method reveals lightning less than 6 miles, or the Storm Hawk indicates lightning in the area we strongly recommend suspending activity until the danger of a lightning strike has passed. We have a communication system to inform all participants and any fans.

DIRECTIONS FOR USING THE LIGHTNING DETECTOR

1. Prior to practice or competition, monitor weather forecast to include calling local agencies for up to date information.
2. Monitor the weather for the following: sudden decrease in temperature, increase in air movement, sudden increase in humidity, visible dark clouds (though these do not have to be present for a lightning strike to occur)
3. Communicate with officials and/or head coach prior to activity about potential for bad weather and our monitoring system.
4. Locate the Lightning detector in an area removed from other electronic devices or machinery, which could cause a false triggering.
5. The Lightning detector is designed to work in vertical or upright position.
6. Turn the unit on.
7. Press the tone button to activate the warning tone. (This must be done every time the lightning detector is turned on.)
8. Each time the Lightning detector detects a lightning stroke it emits an audible warning tone for 1 second (it is not very loud so if there is ANY chance of bad weather you must have the Lightning detector out where you can see and hear it).
9. Following the beep the lightning Range Indicator column will light up for approximately 3 seconds. The single indicator corresponding to the range of the detected stroke will blink for approximately 25 seconds.
10. Activity will be suspended when:
 - a) The Lightning detector registers 2 consecutive lightning strokes within the 8-20 mile range

AND/OR

- b) The Flash/Bang Method reveals lightning within a 6 mile range (30 second or less count between the flash of lightning and the bang of thunder)
11. Once you have determined that there is imminent danger of a lightning strike, communicate to the head coach and/or head official.
12. Evacuate the field and stands to an enclosed-grounded building. **REMEMBER**, a golf cart, automobile, or open shelter does not provide protection from a lightning strike.
13. If there is no available shelter IE, cross-country or golf, each individual should see an area that is flat and in the open. Crouch down wrapping your arms around your knees and remain in that position until the danger of lightning has passed.
14. Activity may be resumed only IF the danger of a lightning strike is no longer present. This decision to resume activity is to be made by a member of the Athletic Training Staff.

The Lightning detector can also detect severe weather conditions (high winds, tornadoes, etc) that may pose a threat to human life. The severe weather audible warning lasts for 15 seconds and the corresponding indicator on the unit lights up.

Directions for Using the Storm Hawk

1. Begin monitoring the weather prior to going out for practice.
2. Communication between athletic training facilities regarding current weather conditions.
3. 2 lightning strikes within 20 miles and 1 lightning strike within 10 miles activity will be suspended for all outdoor venues.
4. Activity may resume once there are no strikes within 10 miles and evidence at 20 miles that the storm is passing.

5. FLASH – BANG Lightning Detection Method

This method of lightning detection should be used in conjunction with the Lightning detector.

1. Prior to practice or competition, monitor weather forecast to include calling local agencies for up to date information.
2. Watch for the flash of lightning.
3. Begin to count (one, one thousand, two one thousand)
4. Stop counting when you hear the bang of thunder.
5. Take this number and divide by 5. This will give you an approximation of how far away the lightning is (5 seconds = 1 mile). EXAMPLE: You see a flash of lightning and you begin to count. You reach 45 before you hear the bang of thunder. $45 \div 5 = 9$. The lightning would be approximately 9 miles away. Using this method you would suspend activity with lightning at or within 6 miles.
6. Activity is resumed with the permission of a member of the Athletic Training Staff 30 minutes after the last lightning detected at or within 6 miles.

A condensed version of this method should be located where athletes using the facility without supervision of a coach, athletic trainer, etc can monitor the lightning for themselves and evacuate to shelter. See next page.

Lightning Detection Procedures for Athletes during Non Supervised Activities

Examples: athletes using facilities in the off season, or outside of regular practice hours

Lightning is a dangerous phenomenon. Athletic teams that practice and compete outdoors are at risk when the weather is inclement. The safest measure to take is to proceed indoors whenever you see thunderclouds forming and remain until the storm passes. Just because you can not see lightning does not mean you are not at risk if you are outdoors. Other warning signs of impending bad weather include: sudden decrease in temperature, sudden change in humidity, increase in air movement, and visible dark storm clouds (though these are not always present during a lightning strike). The Athletic Training staff has a lightning detection policy in place for practices and games; however, we are aware that athletes often use VSU's athletic facilities when there is no supervision by the coaches. In the event athletes are using the facilities without supervision, the Athletic Training staff would like to educate you and encourage you to use FLASH-BANG method to monitor the proximity of the lightning. THE FLASH-BANG Method is an approximation of the distance of the lightning NO METHOD OF LIGHTNING DETECTION CAN DETECT EVERY STRIKE.

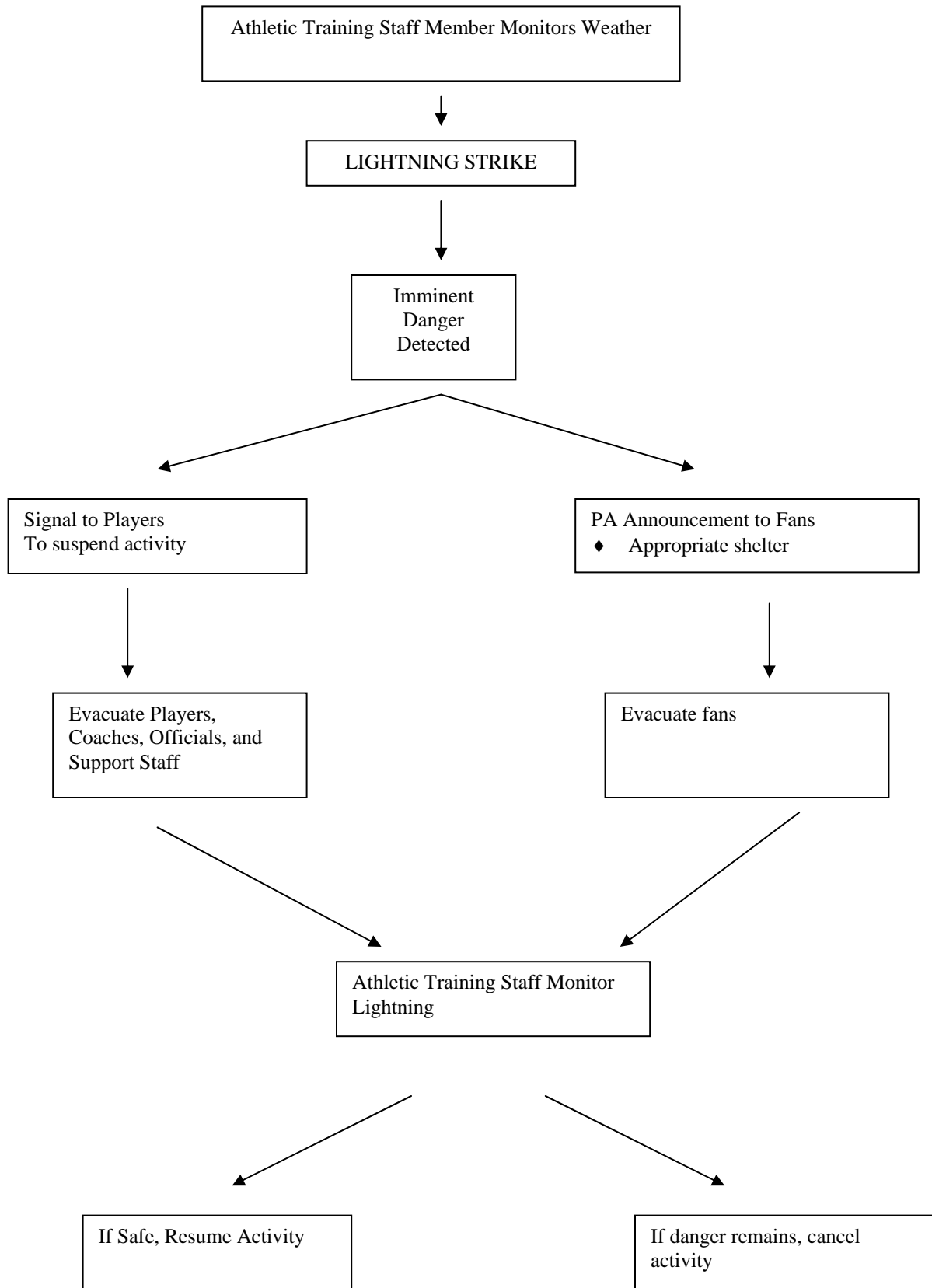
The Flash-bang method of lightning detection:

Auditory: Flash-to-Bang Theory

To use this method:

1. Count the seconds from the time the lightning "flash" is sighted to when the clap of thunder "bang" is heard.
2. Divide this number by five to obtain how far away (in miles) the lightning is occurring. For example, if fifteen seconds are counted between seeing the "flash" and hearing the "bang", fifteen divided by five equals three. Therefore, the lightning flash is approximately three miles away.
 - a. Each five seconds equal one mile
 - b. If the time between seeing the "flash" and hearing the "bang" is between 15-30 seconds (3-6 miles), teams should take precautions and seek shelter.

*The National Severe Storms Laboratory recommends that by the time the spotter obtains a "flash-to-bang" count of fifteen seconds, all individuals should have left the athletic site and reached "safe shelter."



PA ANNOUNCEMENT DURING INCLEMENT WEATHER

May I have your attention! We have been notified of approaching inclement weather. Activity will cease until we have determined it is safe and the risk of lightning is diminished. We advise you to seek shelter in the following areas:

AT VSU:

Football Game: Evacuate to the University Center

Tennis Match : Evacuate to PE Complex

Softball Game: Evacuate to Baseball Fieldhouse (Alternate site is press box)

Baseball Game: Evacuate to Baseball Fieldhouse

Cross Country Race: Suitable Structure, ditch without water, group of trees*

Golf Match: Clubhouse, restroom, ditch without water, group of trees*

Though protection from lightning is not guaranteed, you may seek shelter in an automobile.

Thank you for your cooperation.

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

As a member of the Valdosta State University Athletic Department, I attest that I have read, understand, and will adhere to the aforementioned lightning safety policy.

Signature

Date