

Extreme weather policy

Extremes in Australian weather influence player's safety while competing in Oztag competitions. AOSA strives to ensure all players, officials and spectators are in the safest possible environment and the below guidelines are designed to eliminate the risk of harm to all involved.

Weather conditions can vary greatly between seasons and AOSA supports the judgment of Individual Associations. The decision whether to suspend or cancel games is at the discretion of each Association. AOSA has provided the following guidelines to assist Associations in making the safest decision.

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- Each Association should advertise a contact number or web address that players and officials can ring / visit if they have any doubt whether games will still be on. These should be advertised on the competition draw / website / social media etc
- NSW Oztag advises that when possible (to reduce the disruption to a season), Associations should complete competition rounds, however, this is subject to the safety of players / spectators & officials
- If games are cancelled and rescheduled, Associations need to use their best endeavours to contact delegates / players. Associations will determine the most appropriate method to notify teams. E-mails, phone calls, text messages, facebook and website notices may be used
- Each Association should adopt its own policy with regards to refunding any fees to players should an exceedingly high number of rounds be cancelled with no opportunity to reschedule games during the season.

HOT WEATHER GUIDELINES:

As temperatures rise in NSW consideration must be given to the effects of humidity and dehydration on players especially during summer seasons.

- Preventative measures should be taken to minimize heat injuries. Players, officials and spectators should at all times be encouraged to wear sunscreen, hats and sleeved shirts
- Convenors should be trained in heat management and there should be designated recovery area for any player who over heats
- Ensure regular hydration by players and officials. Drinks should be available at every competition. Tap water should be available free of charge and in unlimited quantities. Associations may wish to sell other drinks
- When the temperature reaches 31 - 37 degrees games should be played as quarters providing extra breaks allowing for rest and fluid intake.
- Where available, shelter and shade should be offered for players, spectators and officials who aren't currently playing
- If the temperature reaches 38+ degrees it is recommended that games are cancelled and rescheduled for a later date. It will be at the discretion of the individual Association in determining whether to cancel games. When making the decision Associations should consider all relevant factors including current weather conditions, climate for that part of the country, level of humidity, amount of shade & shelter available and the age and health of player and officials.

WET WEATHER GUIDELINES:

When determining whether games should be cancelled due to wet weather the following should be considered:

- Whether the relevant council has closed the ground. Some Associations are bound by the councils hiring agreement
- Where the convenor is of the opinion that a field which has not been closed by council, should be closed in the interest of players safety.

- Games should be cancelled if there has been heavy rain in the days leading up to or on competition day. The fields ability to drain should be considered when making this decision
- If rain is light and the start of the competition and games commence but the rain gets heavier as the night goes on, games may be suspended to see if the rain will subside, if there is no change games may need to be cancelled at the venue, especially if the rain becomes heavy enough to impair visibility. If games are cancelled at the venue on the night teams playing in the later time slots should be notified immediately. If the second half of the game had commenced prior to calling the game off – the result should stand. If the game was still in the first half the game should be scheduled to be replayed at a later date if possible.

LIGHTNING GUIDELINES:

While this policy is provided as a recommendation Associations are encouraged to assess each storm individually as they would have a better understanding of the weather patterns in their local area. Associations are also reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure they provide a safe environment for all players, referees and spectators.

Lightning Safety Recommendations

Key elements

The key elements of the lightning safety policy are:

1. Proactive planning
2. Monitoring of weather conditions
3. Clear chain of command
4. Communications
5. Identification of safe structures
6. Definition of criteria for suspension and resumption of activities
7. First aid

1. Proactive planning

Each Association must be responsible for implementing a suitable plan for the management of lightning risk. The plan should be documented and communicated to all competition convenors / referees / players and spectators in such a manner that they are familiar with it and confident in its implementation.

Such a plan may be recorded in your competition guidelines and association's website.

2. Monitoring of weather conditions

Where storms are forecast or seem likely and associations are trying to go ahead with games, it may be prudent to inform players of the possibility of activities being disrupted due to lightning risk. Convenors should be alert to changing weather conditions during the competition and learn to recognize local weather patterns that indicate a high probability of thunderstorms. Convenors have access to weather radar through the Bureau of Meteorology website (www.bom.gov.au) which can be useful for monitoring approaching storm activity.

3. Clear chain of command

Convenors are responsible for monitoring the weather conditions around them and have the responsibility for all players and spectators and have the authority to make a safety call and cease games and move all members to a safer location. This may sometimes require firm insistence that players / spectators follow directions to move to safety.

4. Communication

There must be an established mechanism for communicating the decision to suspend games. If the weather looks uncertain the competition convenor should brief referees on the policy and advise all referees on what they should say to players and where they should send players / spectators in the event that games are suspended.

5. Identification of safe structures

No place is absolutely safe from lightning strikes, but some places are much safer than others. Each location must identify its safe areas and ensure that staff are aware of them.

SAFER areas include:

- Enclosed vehicles with windows closed (car, bus, tractor with cab) Do not touch metal parts
- Substantial enclosed buildings
- Low ground, sheltering in clumps of low bushes
- Trees of uniform height- ie forest.

UNSAFE areas include:

- High ground
- Open ground
- Water
- Isolated or tall trees
- Near outdoor metal structures such as fences, gates, poles, seating, ropes courses
- Insubstantial structures such as picnic sheds and shade shelters
- Machinery such as mowers or unenclosed tractors

If you are caught outside during a storm and feel your hair stand on end or hear buzzing/crackling noise in the air, you are within the field of charge of a lightning strike. Remove metal objects (keys, badges, belts etc), crouch down with feet together, head down and hands over your ears. It is safer to adopt this position if outdoors than to be in one of the unsafe situations listed above.

6. Criteria for suspension and resumption of activities

Lightning can strike more than 10km from the edge of a thunderstorm. It is generally agreed that 10km is the minimum safe distance from a storm. The 30/30 rule is used to serve as a guide for the suspension and safe resumption of activities.

The first part of the 30/30 rule is determined by counting the seconds from when the lightning flash was seen to when the thunder is heard. Sound travels at about 1 kilometre every 3 seconds, so a 30 second interval means the storm is 10km away.

Staff should be monitoring the storm's approach and as the flash to bang count nears 30 seconds, people at risk should already be seeking safe shelter. A "flash to bang" count of 30 seconds or less requires immediate and urgent evacuation to safety. The second part of the 30/30 rule provides the criteria for resuming activities.

It is recommended that the storm be 20km away before it is considered safe. A typical storm moves at 40km/h, so waiting 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning seen provides the 20km safe distance.

It is important to emphasize that blue sky and the absence of rain are not adequate reasons to ignore the 30/30 rule. Many victims are struck before the storm actually arrives because they wait too long to seek shelter. This is the proverbial "bolt from the blue". The 30/30 rule is not an absolute rule. A storm may move very quickly, or not generate any lightning or thunder until it is very close, or topographical or wind conditions may prevent sound from traveling to your position. These conditions are especially common in mountain areas. It is important that staff observe weather conditions and be alert to the possibility of the above occurring.

7. First Aid

Victims of lightning strikes are safe to handle- they do not "retain charge". First aiders must ensure they do not become another casualty- move the victim to a safer location. Effects of lightning strike include cardiac and respiratory arrest caused by disruption of the brains' control centres. CPR or EAR should be given as required. It is important that even people who show no symptoms immediately after the strike receive medical attention as some effects may not be immediately obvious.