

Severe Weather Pre-Competition Planning

- Designate a member of competition staff to monitor weather and initiate the stop or delay and resumption of competition if needed.
- Weather monitoring should begin several days before the competition and become more consistent in the hours before the start of the competition.
- Locate the safest structures or locations for participants (including competitors, horses, spectators, volunteers, staff, and others present) to take shelter in, then create an evacuation plan, and know how long it will take for everyone to get there.
- Create a protocol to notify participants of the stop or delay and resumption of competition.
- Review protocol with all competition staff.

It is important to have a plan in place in case of a tornado, lightning or other severe weather conditions. Think about where the safest places to go for shelter are and what the best plans to accommodate horses and people are.

Early notice is a requirement and a huge advantage; use everything you can to get a head start! The Safety Coordinator or another member of the competition staff should review weather updates at regular intervals during the entire competition (see the resources below for a list of some weather notification services). The Scorer or Secretary may also be a good choice to monitor the weather if they are working on computers connected to the internet and can receive automatic updates at regular intervals.

Lightning is the most common type of severe weather that affects athletic events, and equestrian sport is not an exception. If a storm is close enough for thunder to be heard, then you are close enough to be struck by lightning. Even if you can't hear the thunder, you may still be at risk. The myths that lightning will only strike the tallest object and never the same place twice are not true: lightning will strike the best conductor on the ground, which could be a competitor or a horse. Lightning can strike even when it is sunny, under clear skies when thunderstorms are present in the area but not directly overhead (it has been known to strike as far away as 10 miles from the storm).

When a severe weather Warning has been issued, or at the sight of lightning, the sound of thunder, or any indication of other severe weather (such as a funnel cloud, blizzard, etc.) the competition should be stopped until at least 30 minutes have passed without severe weather. For lightning, the 30/30 rule is a commonly recommended minimum policy: by the time you count 30 seconds between lightning and thunder (five seconds equals 1 mile), the competition should be stopped and not resumed for 30 minutes after the last signs of severe weather.

Please be aware that many lightning injuries/casualties occur at the beginning or after the perceived threat has passed. Use common sense when determining when to stop the competition and when to resume. Take into consideration the local weather patterns and safety needs when creating your severe weather plan.

During the stop or delay in the competition in the case of lightning, all participants in the competition should take shelter in a large enclosed structure if possible or in fully enclosed vehicles and stay away from metal or conductive surfaces. Places with conditions or objects such as open fields, isolated trees, unprotected gazebos, rain or picnic shelters, flagpoles, light poles, bleachers (wooden or metal), metal fences, convertible vehicles, golf carts, or water should be avoided. Flooding often accompanies severe weather, so be aware of and avoid areas where water may collect.

It is important to ensure that the scene is safe for emergency responders (professional or bystanders) before initiating medical care to a victim of severe weather. No one benefits if the responders become the next victims. Stay away from downed power lines, damaged structures, and other dangerous circumstances, especially if life-threatening severe weather is still on-going.

Once the scene is safe for the responders, a person or a horse that has been struck by lightning does not carry a charge and is safe to touch to provide medical care. Providing prompt CPR is highly effective in a person's survival of a lightning strike. Keep in mind that horses are highly sensitive to electrical charges and may need rapid veterinary care if they are struck or even if they were in the vicinity where lightning struck.

Resources:

- American Red Cross: www.redcross.org
- Federal Emergency Management Agency: www.fema.gov
- The Weather Channel: www.weather.com
- National Lightning Safety Institute: www.lightningsafety.com
- National Severe Storms Laboratory: www.nssl.noaa.gov
- National Weather Service: www.nws.noaa.gov or www.weather.gov
- Weather Call Lightning: <http://lightningcall.net/outdoorsports.html>
- Weather Underground: www.wunderground.com