

## Football Northern territory Lightning Policy

Darwin is the lightning capital of the world. On one day in the 2018 wet season Darwin recorded 91,000 lightning strikes. Many other areas of the Territory are also lightning magnets. The Bininj Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land recognised the high volume of lightning and believe that Namarrgon is the creation ancestor/spirit responsible for the spectacular weather experienced across Arnhem Land. Namarrgon uses axes affixed to his head, elbows and feet to split the dark clouds and make lightning as he travels across the land.

During the wet season the Top End puts on a spectacular lightshow that is a storm-chasers dream but can be a sporting administrator's nightmare.

It is estimated that 10 people die a year from lightning strikes with more than 150 seriously injured or incapacitated. Lightning presents a real risk of death or serious injury to outdoor football participants.

Please note that 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 in the lethal zone). Administrators must not let the desire to start or complete a match, training session, clinic or special event hinder their judgment when the safety of players, coaches or spectators is at risk.

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**

Science and experience have given us the 30/30 insight. The guideline states that 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 around 340m per second. Given the lightning is less than 10ks away you should 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.

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

In addition, it is suggested that clubs, Associations and event organisers comply with the 2007 Australian Lightning Standard (AS1768-2007). The Standard states that *"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."*

### **Personal Safety Guidelines**

#### **Before the activity**

Prior to any outdoor football activity be it match days, training or an event the following checks should be made:

Check weather forecasts for likely thunderstorms on the BOM website [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au); 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 on BOM.

Consider informing participants ahead of the event that it may be disrupted due to lightning risk.

### **On the day of the activity**

On the match, training or event day the following should occur:

Monitor the surroundings for indications of the onset of thunderstorms.

Where there is a forecast or sighting of thunderstorm activity, increased awareness and monitoring of lightning risk should continue until the event has finished.

If lightning is predicted within 10km of the match or event venue at the scheduled starting time, consideration may be given to delaying commencement time of the match or event.

The decision to delay or suspend a match, training or event as well as to resume activity will be made by the event organizer, coach or referee based on (i) information obtained from the BOM website and discussions with club and venue officials; or (ii) application of the 30/30 Guideline. Equally the decision to resume activity will be made by the event organizer, coach or referee based on the above (i and ii).

### **General Guidelines for Clubs and their committees**

- (a) 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.
- (b) A decision to delay, suspend or resume training or activity should be made based on the 30/30 Guideline.
- (c) 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.
- (d) 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 outlined in the 30/30 Guideline above).

### **General safety measures as recommended by the Australian Standard AS1768-2007**

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 unearthened 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.

*Thank you to ABC Darwin, Australian Standards and NT Government for information on lightning activity in the NT.*