

Lightning Policy



Chain of Command

The responsibility for terminating or postponing an athletic activity in the event of lightning, severe weather, or storms lies with the LU certified athletic trainer (practices) or the LU Game Administrator (games).

- An LU certified athletic trainer will communicate with the LU Game Administrator, the head coach and/or his/her designee, and game official(s)/umpire(s) of the potential for a lightning strike, severe weather, and/or storm, and will make the recommendation that all activities stop immediately.
- If the head coach is not present, an assistant coach will assume responsibility.
- If a coach and/or game official(s)/umpire(s) make the decision to continue to practice and/or continue with a game or other activity despite a National Weather Service Severe Weather Warning, the cancellation of classes, and/or the verbal instruction by a LU certified athletic trainer or LU Game Administrator, they will be doing so against the recommendations of the LU Athletics Department, and will be personally liable for any and all injuries.

Criteria For Evacuation of the Practice /Game Area

The policy of the Liberty University Athletics Department will be as follows:

- An LU certified athletic trainer will inform the visiting team's athletic trainer and/or coach and game official(s) / umpire(s) of LU's policy with regards to lightning, severe weather, and/or storms during pre-game warm-ups.
- An LU certified athletic trainer will monitor the lightning and storm activity via electronic notification system.
- When a lightning strike occurs **within 20 miles of the facility or a severe weather warning is issued**, an alert will be issued electronically to the LU certified athletic trainer. That information will be relayed to the following persons:

- The game official / umpire (at a break in the action)
- The LU head coach and/or his/her designee
- The visiting team's athletic trainer and/or coach (if applicable); and
- LU game administrator / operations staff (if applicable)

- When a lightning strike occurs **within 8 miles of the facility**, an alert will be issued electronically to the LU certified athletic trainer to **clear the field of play**. That information will be relayed to the following persons:

- The game official(s) / umpire(s)
- The LU head coach and/or his/her designee
- The visiting team's athletic trainer and/or coach (if applicable); and
- LU game administrator / operations staff (if applicable)

At this point, all game/practice activities are to cease **IMMEDIATELY**, and ALL personnel are to evacuate to a safe structure or location.

- Prior to game or practice activities, an LU certified athletic trainer or LU game administrator will notify visiting team personnel of a designated safe location for their team, should lightning or severe weather occur.
- Any spectators present at the facility should also seek a safe structure or location. It is advised that all spectators not directly working with either team should seek the safety of their vehicle, so long as it qualifies as a safe structure.
- A safe structure or location is defined as “any sturdy, fully enclosed, substantial, and frequently inhabited building that has plumbing and/or electrical wiring that acts to electrically ground the structure”. Examples of locations that routinely **DO NOT** meet the criteria include-
 - Baseball / softball dugouts or “covered” batting cages.
 - Outside storage sheds.
 - Canopy / awning / tent.

- In the absence of a safe area as described above, a secondary structure such as a fully enclosed vehicle with a hard metal roof, rubber tires, and completely closed windows can provide a measure of safety. Golf carts do not provide enough protection and cannot be considered safe from lightning.
- Persons should avoid taking showers and using plumbing facilities (pools, whirlpools, jacuzzi, etc) and land-line telephones during a thunderstorm.
- If no safe structure or location is within a reasonable distance, personnel should find a thick grove of small trees surrounded by taller trees or a dry ditch. Everyone should assume the “lightning-safe” position- a crouched position on the ground with the feet together, weight on the balls of the feet, head lowered, and ears covered. **DO NOT LIE FLAT!** Minimize the body’s surface area and minimize contact with the ground.
- If unable to reach safe shelter, persons should stay away from the tallest trees or objects (i.e. light poles, flag poles, etc.), metal objects (i.e. fences, bleachers, etc.), individual trees, standing pools of water, and open fields. Persons should avoid being the highest object in an open field.
- In situations where thunder and/or lightning may or may not be present, yet someone feels his/her hair stand on end and skin tingle, **LIGHTNING IS IMMINENT!** Therefore, all persons should assume the “lightning-safe” position as described above.
- A cellular and/or portable remote phone is a safe alternative to land-line phones, if the person and the antenna are located within a safe structure or location, and if all other precautions are followed.
- If the LU administration have canceled classes at the university due to severe weather, the LU Athletics Department recommends the cancellation of all games, practices, and other activities.
- All individuals should have the right to leave a site or activity, without fear of repercussion or penalty, in order to seek a safe structure or location if they feel that they are in danger from impending lightning activity.

Criteria For Safe Return to the Practice/Game Area

- Personnel should not return to the practice/game area until **thirty (30) minutes have passed since the last lightning strike has occurred within 8 miles** of the athletic facility in use.
- Each time a lightning strike occurs within 8 miles, the “30-minute clock” is to be reset.
- An electronic alert will be sent to the certified LU athletic trainer indicating when no strikes have occurred inside of 8 miles within the previous 30 minutes.
- Blue skies in the local area and/or a lack of rainfall are not adequate reasons to breach the 30-minute return-to-play rule. Lightning can strike up to ten (10) miles away from the rainshaft of a storm.

Prehospital Care of Victims of a Lightning Strike

- Because lightning-strike victims do not remain connected to a power source, they do not carry an electric charge. Therefore, it is safe to touch the victim to move him/her to a safe location and to render medical treatment.
- During an ongoing thunderstorm, lightning activity in the local area still poses a deadly hazard for personnel responding to the victim. Personnel should consider his/her own personal safety before venturing into a dangerous situation to render care.

- The first priority of personnel is to move the lightning strike victim to a safe location.
- Prompt, aggressive CPR has been highly effective for the survival of victims of lightning strikes. Therefore, it is critical that CPR and AED use is initiated as soon as safely possible.
- The basic triage principle of "treat the living first" should be reversed in cases involving casualties from a lightning strike. It is imperative to treat those persons who are "apparently dead" first.
- Lightning strike victims should be evaluated and treated for hypothermia, shock, fractures, and burns as well.

References:

Bennett, B.L. (1997). A model lightning safety policy for athletics. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 3, 251-253.

NCAA Guideline 1D: Lightning Safety. *NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook* (1999).

Walsh, K.M. et. al (2001). National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Lightning Safety for Athletics & Recreation. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 34(4), 471-477.

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SPORTS MEDICINE DEPARTMENT

Lightning / Severe Weather Statement To Be Read at Outside Events

LU Football / Baseball / Softball / Soccer / Track Stadium-

In the event of lightning, thunder, or other severe weather, it is the policy of the LU Athletics Department that all spectators immediately evacuate the grandstand and bleacher areas. It is advised that spectators evacuate to hard-topped vehicles until it has been determined that it is safe to return to the grandstand and bleacher areas.

LU Tennis Courts

In the event of lightning, thunder, or other severe weather, it is the policy of the LU Athletics Department that all spectators immediately evacuate the grandstand and court areas. It is advised that spectators evacuate to hard-topped vehicles or a fully enclosed building until it has been determined that it is safe to return to the grandstand and court areas.

Off-Campus Athletic Venues (e.g. Cross Country, Golf, etc.)

In the event of lightning, thunder, or other severe weather, it is the policy of the LU Athletics Department that all spectators immediately evacuate the area. It is advised that spectators evacuate to hard-topped vehicles or fully enclosed buildings until it has been determined that it is safe to return to the grandstand and bleacher areas.