CAPLAX EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN GUIDELINES (DRAFT)

Background

Lightning occurs when a combination of natural weather conditions come together to create an electrical impulse. Lightning can occur many miles from the parent thunderstorm – outside the actual storm and visible thundercloud. Caution must be exerted as the storm approaches and for a substantial time period after the storm. Lightning cannot occur in the absence of thunder; however, thunder is not always heard.

Approximately 1/3 of all individuals struck by lightning are involved in some type of recreational activity, either as a participant or as a spectator. Within the United States, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimates that 60-70 fatalities and about 10 times as many injuries occur from lightning strikes each year. Understanding basic lightning principles and following proper safety precautions can decrease the risk of lightning related injury.

In preparation for practice and games, it is important that an emergency action plan (EAP) is in place, and that preparation for thunderstorms, lightning and other weather-related issues are considered as part of the EAP. Education, prevention and planned access to early defibrillation are essential for weather related injury.

Several resources are available that discuss lightning related injury, including the National Weather Service (NWS), National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS),and the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA). These resources and other scientific references were utilized to form the following US Lacrosse recommendation.

Recommendation of US Lacrosse, UIL, and NATA

It is the recommendation of that all organizations, facilities, administrators, athletic medicine staff and coaches follow an EAP with specific guidelines for severe weather that may include lightning. The EAP should be developed by those who are familiar with the athletic venue as well as surrounding emergency medical facilities. It is important that anyone using the facility is aware of the EAP specific to that site, including organizing bodies, administrators, coaches and athletes.

Emergency Action Plan: Weather Related Issues

The EAP should include the following components:

1. Establish a chain of command that identifies who is to make the call to remove individuals from the field.
	* There is generally a hierarchy of individuals responsible for game management and medical issues as well as determining if play should be suspended. Individuals included in this chain of command can include Site and Game administrators, officials, physicians, certified athletic trainers, coaches, parents, and athletes.
	* Rule books put the authority in the hands of the referee to make the call to leave the field in inclement weather. However, it is important that the Game Administrator and members of the coaching staff, as well as others provide input to the officials prior to the decision to seek safe shelter. At a practice, coaches, athletic trainers, and other personnel are urged to follow these recommendations to provide a safe environment.
	* For CAPLAX the Chain of Command is Host Site Administrator, Game Day Administrator, Coaches/Referee
2. Name a designated weather watcher (A person who actively looks for the signs of threatening weather and notifies the chain of command if severe weather becomes dangerous).
	* CAPLAX designates the Game Administrator as the weather watcher
3. Have a means of monitoring local weather forecasts and warnings.
	* Every Game Administrator and Coach is required to download and use the WeatherBug App that has a Spark Lightning indicator.  Parents are encouraged to download this App as well.  This App is free of charge.
4. WeatherBug guidance should be followed-when displaying seek shelter immediately( lightning is within a 10 mile radius)-games/practice should be suspended for 30 minutes.
5. When thunder is heard within 30 seconds of a visible lightning strike, or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play for thirty minutes and take shelter immediately..
6. Once activities have been suspended, wait at least thirty minutes following the last sound of thunder or lightning flash prior to resuming an activity or returning outdoors.
7. Designate a safe shelter for each venue. See examples below.
8. Avoid being the highest point in an open field, in contact with, or proximity to the highest point, as well as being on the open water. Do not take shelter under or near trees, flagpoles, or light poles.
9. Assume that lightning safe position (crouched on the ground weight on the balls of the feet, feet together, head lowered, and ears covered) for individuals who feel their hair stand on end, skin tingle, or hear "crackling" noises. Do not lie flat on the ground.
10. Observe the following basic first aid procedures in managing victims of a lightning strike:
	* Activate local EMS
	* Lightning victims do not "carry a charge" and are safe to touch.
	* If necessary, move the victim with care to a safer location.
	* Evaluate airway, breathing, and circulation, and begin CPR if necessary.
	* Evaluate and treat for hypothermia, shock, fractures, and/or burns.
11. All individuals have the right to leave an athletic site in order to seek a safe structure if the person feels in danger of impending lightning activity, without fear of repercussions or penalty from anyone.

### Definitions

**Safe Shelter:**

1. A safe location is any substantial, frequently inhabited building. The building should have four solid walls (not a dug out), electrical and telephone wiring, as well as plumbing, all of which aid in grounding a structure.
2. The secondary choice for a safer location from the lightning hazard is a fully enclosed vehicle with a metal roof and the windows completely closed. It is important to not touch any part of the metal framework of the vehicle while inside it during ongoing thunderstorms.
3. It is not safe to shower, bathe, or talk on landline phones while inside of a safe shelter during thunderstorms (cell phones are ok).