

Shelby County Outdoor Venues

County Parks and Outdoor Venues

Lightning Safety Policy

Lightning is the most consistent and significant weather hazard that may affect outdoor athletics or activities. While the probability of being struck by lightning is low, the odds are significantly greater when a storm is in the area and proper safety precautions are not followed. The following steps and policy is recommended by the National Weather Service and Shelby County Department of Development Services – Emergency Management. The Shelby County Commission and County Manager hereby approves of this policy. Shelby County Facilities & General Services shall distribute the policy to all tenants and event organizers.

Public Notification: Event attendees should be provided with the following information:

- Before the event begins, attendees should be informed if a lightning threat exists and that protective action may be required that day. Instructions should be given on what protective measures should be taken if the lightning threat materializes.
- During the event, the attendees should be notified of any imminent threat and specific directions on taking protective action.
- After a delay, an “all clear” notice when it is safe to leave the shelter and/or return to the event location.
- All public notifications should be made by a coach, umpire, referee or event personnel.

Before a scheduled game, practice or event:

- Public notification officials denoted above should monitor local weather reports each day before any game, practice or event.
- Be diligently aware of potential thunderstorms that may form during scheduled events.
- Weather information can be found through various means including: the free weatherbug smartphone app (which includes distance to lightning information), free Baron SAF-T-NET app with push information on approaching storm warnings, other smartphone apps, radio, television or the Birmingham National Weather Service at www.weather.gov/bmx.
- Be informed of National Weather Service (NWS) issued thunderstorm watches or warnings and the warning signs of developing thunderstorms in the area, such as high winds or darkening skies.

During a scheduled game, practice or event:

- Designate a weather watcher to monitor threatening weather and to notify someone, such as coaches, referee or umpire, who can suspend or cancel a game or practice.
 - This weather watcher should not be a coach, umpire or referee, as they are not free to devote the attention needed to adequately monitor conditions.
 - This person should use at least one weather information source and keep abreast of changes to the forecast and current conditions.
 - This person should know how to get thunderstorm forecasts.
 - If available, mobile technology (i.e.: smartphone weather apps) should be used.

- The weather watcher's main responsibility is to keep their eyes and ears to the sky during the event.
- Know where the closest safe location is to the field and how long it takes to evacuate to that location for all personnel at the event.
 - A safe location at our county parks (Examples: Beeswax, Heardmont, 1996 Fields, Forest Parks) is any vehicle with a hard metal roof (neither a convertible nor a golf cart) with the windows shut. The hard metal frame and roof, not the rubber tires, provide a measure of safety by dissipating lightning current around the vehicle and not through the occupants. It is important not to touch the metal framework of the vehicle.
 - Outside locations increase the risk of being struck by lightning when thunderstorms are in the area. Small covered shelters, such as dugouts and refreshment stands, are usually unsafe and may actually increase the risk of lightning injury. Other dangerous locations include bodies of water and areas connected to, or near, light poles, towers and fences that can carry a nearby strike to people. Also dangerous is any location that makes the person the highest point in the area.
- The National Weather Service suggests, "when thunder roars, go indoors." Lightning awareness should be heightened at the first flash of lightning, clap of thunder and/or other signs of impending storms such as increasing winds or darkening skies, no matter how far away. These types of weather should be treated as a "wake-up call" to persons monitoring the weather and game officials. Preparations to invoke this lightning safety plan should begin at this time or no later than when lightning is 8 miles or closer to the venue.
- **As a minimum**, all facilities should be evacuated by the time lightning is within 6 miles of the field. Therefore, all activities should be suspended or cancelled and participants and spectators should begin orderly evacuation when lightning is within 8 miles of the field, or sooner. Fast moving storms may call for more notice than slow moving storms.
 - To determine distance to lightning, use the "Flash to Bang" method, smartphone weather apps, such as the lightning monitor on weatherbug, or other technologies.
 - Flash to Bang: to estimate the distance between your location and a lightning flash, count the number of seconds between observing lightning and hearing thunder. Divide the number of seconds by five to obtain the distance in miles. Example: if you see lightning and it takes 15 seconds before you hear the thunder, lightning is 3 miles away.
- Officials with each team, umpires/referees or event should ensure a safe and orderly evacuation from the venue.

After lightning or storms have passed:

- To resume a game, practice or event, wait 30 minutes after both the last sound of thunder and the last flash of lightning and the storm is moving away from the venue.
- The official who suspended the game should be the same person to resume or cancel the game.