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## **SPORTS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP LIGHTNING POLICY MEMO**

YMCA of the USA and the host YMCA for any Sports National Championships event are aware of the risks associated with YMCA activities. One of these risks in competitive aquatics is lightning. Lightning can affect programs. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of our athletes at these events.

Lightning is part of a severe weather storm where electrical surges travel from clouds towards the earth or from the ground towards the sky. On average, lightning causes more casualties annually in the United States than any other storm related phenomena, except floods. Many people are injured or killed as a result of misinformation and inappropriate behavior during thunderstorms. Lightning is generally thought of as a threat to outdoor facilities, but the threat of electrocution exists inside a building as well. Simply put, if there is an electrical storm outside - you should evacuate an indoor pool and other wet areas of the facility. A few simple precautions can reduce many of the dangers posed by lightning.

The National Lightning Safety Institute recommends the following practices to reduce the risk of being struck by lightning:

- Plan in advance — when you first hear thunder or see lightning, take immediate action. Go into a building or inside a vehicle. Lightning typically precedes rain, so don't wait for the rain to begin to suspend your activities
- If you are outdoors — avoid water, stay off high ground, and avoid open spaces. Stay away from all metal objects, including electric wires, fences, machinery, motors, power tools, etc. Unsafe places include underneath canopies, open air pavilions, small picnic or rain shelters, or near trees. Where possible, find shelter in a substantial building or in a fully enclosed metal vehicle, such as a car, truck, or van. Keep the windows completely shut. Avoid touching any metal in the vehicle.
- If indoors — avoid water. Stay away from doors and windows. Do not use telephones with cords. Take off headsets. Turn off and stay away from appliances, computers, power tools, and TV Sets. Lightning may strike outside electric and phone wires causing shocks to travel inside.
- Suspend activities for thirty minutes after the last observed lightning or sound of thunder.
- Injured persons do not carry an electrical charge and can be handled safely. Render first aid if qualified to do so. Call 911.
- Know your emergency telephone numbers.

There is no safe place outdoors in a lightning storm. When there is no safe place in a building or in a vehicle nearby, the National Weather Service recommends the following last resort actions to lessen the threat of being struck by lightning:

- Do not seek shelter under tall isolated trees! Stay away from all tall isolated objects. Lightning typically strikes the tallest object; that could be you in an open field or clearing.
- Do not seek shelter under partially enclosed buildings.
- Know the weather patterns of the area. For example, in mountainous areas lightning storms develop in early afternoon, so plan your hike early in the day and be off the mountain before then.

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- Know the forecast for your area. If a high chance of lightning storms is predicted curtail your plans or reschedule (avoid the risk).
- Do not place your campsite in an open field or on the top of a hill or ridge. A tent offers no protection from lightning. If you are in a forest stay in a lower stand of trees. If you are camping in an open area, locate your site in a ravine or valley.
- If lightning is striking nearby and you are outdoors you should: Crouch down, put feet together and put hands over your ears to minimize hearing damage from thunder.

### **YMCA Sports National Championship Policy and Procedure**

- Y-USA representatives will work with the host facility to designate a chain of command as to who monitors inclement weather and who makes the decision to move a program or event. An emergency plan/Aquatic Safety Plan should include planned instructions for inclement weather. In the case where the facility's policy and the YMCA of the USA's differ, the Y-USA policy on clearing the pool will be followed.
- A Y-USA representative will obtain a weather report each day during the event. Be aware of potential thunderstorms that may form during YMCA facility hours or activities.
- A Y-USA representative will be required to be aware of National Weather Service-issued thunderstorm "watches" and "warnings" as well as the signs of thunderstorms developing nearby. A "watch" means conditions are favorable for severe weather to develop in an area; a "warning" means that severe weather has been reported in an area and for everyone to take proper precautions.
- A Y-USA representative will do a pre-event check with the facility to ensure volunteer and staff know where the closest safe area, structure, or location is in within the facility or outdoors.  
Know  
how long it takes to get to that safe area structure or location. Safe area, structure, or location is  
defined as:
  - a. Any building or indoor area normally occupied or frequently used by people. Avoid using wet areas for safe shelter and do not use the phones, showers, or plumbing facilities during a thunderstorm.
  - b. In the absence of a sturdy, frequently inhabited building, any vehicle (cars, vans, or busses) with a hard metal roof and rolled-up windows can provide a measure of safety.  
It is not the rubber tires that make a vehicle a safe shelter, but the hard metal roof which dissipates the lightning strike around the vehicle. **DO NOT TOUCH THE SIDES OF THE VEHICLE!**
- The Y-USA representative and/or facility host staff are responsible for being aware of how close lightning is occurring. If the YMCA of the USA leader or facility staff sees a flash or hears thunder, the activities should be terminated until thirty minutes after the last flash or sound of thunder.

If lightning occurs at a Sports National Championship event, the plan below will be followed:

1. If lightning occurs in the area and is observed by facility staff, or YMCA staff or volunteers, then outdoor pools, indoor pools, whirlpools, steam rooms, saunas, and showers will be vacated. Lightning will be considered to be in the area when one or more of the following occurs:
  - a. Lightning is seen
  - b. Thunder is heard
  - c. A severe thunderstorm or tornado warning has been issued for the local area
  - d. Notification from a lightning detection network are detected within a few miles or appear to be approaching the local area

1. The pool and shower areas will be evacuated until 30 minutes after the last evidence of lightning is present. While bonding and grounding may add a level of protection, there is no way to completely reduce the risk so the YMCA will still evacuate the pool and other wet areas to ensure safety.

### **Intended/Unintended Consequences**

YMCA of the USA and the host YMCA are not responsible for any intended or unintended consequences related to removing an athlete from competition for a head injury. This includes, but is not limited to, any financial reimbursement associated with such removal.

### **Resources:**

American Meteorological Society Recommendations for Lightning Safety:

<https://communities.ymca.net/Aquatics/CommunityDocuments/AMS%202002%20Updated%20Recommendations.pdf>

American Red Cross Lightning Safety for Outdoor and Indoor Pools:

<https://communities.ymca.net/Aquatics/CommunityDocuments/ACFASP%20Lightning%20Safety%20for%20Pools%20Advisory%20Statement.pdf>

The Redwoods Group Lightning and Pool-Closure Policy:

[https://communities.ymca.net/Aquatics/CommunityDocuments/Y\\_RMA\\_LightningPoolClosurePolicy\\_12.11.08.pdf](https://communities.ymca.net/Aquatics/CommunityDocuments/Y_RMA_LightningPoolClosurePolicy_12.11.08.pdf)

YMCA Lightning Safety Guidelines for YMCAs:

<https://communities.ymca.net/Aquatics/CommunityDocuments/Lightning%20Safety%20Guidelines%20for%20YMCAs%20Updated%202008.pdf>

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