# USAFLUA Lightning & Severe Weather Safety Policy

The Field Umpire(s) has discretionary power to suspend the game(s) whenever, not just for reason of the elements, but also for interference by spectators or other cause, and where such action is deemed necessary. A suspended game may be resumed should conditions allow. If the suspended game is not resumed the same day, the Field Umpire shall file a report with the USAFL for later administrative action.

The final decision to delay, suspend, and/or or resume play is granted solely to the Lead Field Umpire. The Field Umpire(s) jurisdiction shall begin thirty minutes prior to the schedule start of a match and end when the Field Umpire(s) leave the site of the competition. The site of the competition is defined as the field, locker rooms, parking areas, and the surroundings generally associated with athletics facilities.

Umpires should adhere to the following:

* ***Lightning is dangerous!!!***  **If lightning is within five miles, whether or not thunder is audible, the game should be suspended and shelter sought immediately**. The existence of blue sky and the absence of rain are not protection from lightning. It does not have to be raining for lightning to strike! Lightning can, and does, strike as far as 10 miles away from the rain shaft. A simple rule to remember:

--- ***If you can see it or hear it - clear it!* ---**

* A lightning strike detector or app such as “Coach Smart” designed and distributed freely from Vanderbilt University is strongly recommended. These can identify the distance accurately but may not be available. A rough guideline is to **measure the time between the lightning flash and hearing the corresponding thunder. If it is 30 seconds or less, seek shelter.**
* The flash-to-bang method is the easiest and most convenient way to estimate how far away lightning is occurring. To use the flash-to-bang method, ***count the seconds from the time the lightning is sighted to when the clap of thunder is heard. Divide this number by five to obtain how many miles away the lightning is occurring.***  It is important to remember ***when thunder is heard, lightning is in the vicinity as thunder always accompanies lightning!***
* The above guidelines are put in place to ensure the safety of the participants and spectators.  While they outline a general set of guidelines and recommendations, ***nothing replaces the common sense and eyes/ears of the Umpire crew***.  It is the crew’s responsibility to ensure the conditions for play are safe to the best of their ability utilizing all the information that they have available.
* It is the responsibility of the Tournament Organizer(s) and/or Host Team Representative(s) to inform participating teams of notification and evacuation plans and shelters near the playing sites prior to start of play. Generally, participants should seek immediate shelter in their automobiles or a designated severe weather shelter, if there is one nearby. Avoid smaller, open structures, tents, trees, and isolated areas. Cars, with windows rolled up, or buses can provide good shelter. Avoid contacting metal or other conducting materials to the outside surfaces. Do not stay in open, unprotected areas.
* **Games should not be restarted for at least 30 minutes** after the last lightning strike is seen or roll of thunder is heard.
* The Field Umpire(s) should rely on all available information including Boundary and Goal Umpires, who shall immediately inform the Field Umpire(s) if they see lightning or hear thunder.

## Match Day Lightning Policy Guideline

* Upon hearing thunder, seeing lightning, or informed of such, the Field Umpire shall immediately blow the whistle, stop play (note position and possession of ball for resumption of play), and order all players, team representatives, and spectators to leave the field and surrounding area immediately and seek appropriate shelter.
* Once Umpire Crew has obtain safe and secure shelter, they shall:
  + Start a timer to measure the intervals between strikes of lightning.
  + Establish a communication process with the Match Day Managers or other Team Representatives and, if available, a connection to the NWS for forecast and radar information.
  + Verify and document time, score, and ball possession and position at time of stoppage so as to determine restart and/or file report in case of permanent stoppage.
  + Once interval passes twenty minutes, start the communication process with the Team and/or Tournament Representatives to determine the length of time each team will have to warm up prior to the re-start of the match and how the match will be restarted.
  + If current weather conditions, forecasts, radar, and/or the elapsed time has passed beyond these guidelines indicate that the restart of the match is no longer possible, the Field Umpires will gather with the Team and/or Tournament Representatives and advise them:
    - The match will not be restarted
    - Provide game stats at time of stoppage
    - Review the next steps each group will be expected to take to document and report the match to the USAFL.
* Deciding not to start or resume a game due to lightening may be a controversial decision for some of those involved. The final decision to delay, suspend, and/or or resume play is granted solely to the Lead Field Umpire. Teams may have traveled a long distance to play an important game and player availability may limit options for rescheduling games. There will be situations where umpires will be asked to allow a game(s) to be played when the conditions were questionable due to the “importance” of the match or the “difficulty rescheduling. These economic and competitive considerations cannot take precedence over the players’ safety! ***The safety of the participants is the paramount consideration*** ***and it is the Umpire’s responsibility to act in the interest of safety first!***
* If there are conflicting pieces of information or a difference of opinion using flash-to bang methods, ***umpire should always*** ***err on the side of safety*** until the information can be aligned or agreed upon.