

Developing an action plan for risk from lightning

Row Safe Further Guidance (Amended 15.12.08)



Rowing clubs and event organisers have a duty to be proactive in their approach to lightning and as such include in their safety plans an action plan that can be implemented when lightning approaches. This would obviously take into account local conditions, but there are some basic recommendations that can be followed:

- Use the '30 - 30 Rule' when you see lightning, count the time until you hear the thunder.
- If it is 30 seconds (approx. 10 km away) or less, seek 'proper shelter'.
- If you can't see the lightning, just hearing the thunder is a good back-up rule for it being time to seek 'proper shelter'.
- Wait a minimum of 30 minutes after the last lightning or thunder before leaving shelter.

On average a typical storm moves at about 40 km/h giving approx 15 minutes to seek 'proper shelter'. Although no place is absolutely safe from lightning some are safer than others and 'proper shelter' can be:

- an enclosed substantial building with electric and telephone wiring and plumbing to provide a safe pathway for the current to earth to the ground.
- a fully enclosed metal vehicle with windows shut. This acts as a Faraday cage and guides the lightning around the passengers - mini-buses are an excellent shelter for large groups of people.

Unsafe locations and situations are:

- open spaces - field, lake, river
- underneath canopies, small rain shelters, trees, umbrellas, tents & marquees

- close vicinity to the tallest structure in an area
- near metal or carbon objects - riggers, boats, blades, trailers, launches, etc.
- using electrical appliances or plumbing such as water taps, sinks etc.

CREATING AN EVENT ACTION PLAN

Event organisers should develop a proactive approach including the following:

- identifying the individual/s who will watch the weather and make decisions
- consulting forecasts from the day before and monitoring the weather during the event
- establishing a chain of command and method of warning both competitors and spectators
- identifying 'proper shelter'
- defining the criteria for both suspension and resumption of activity.

Clubs can help their members by:

- listing the criteria for suspension and resumption of training
- identifying 'proper shelter' besides unsafe locations and situations
- encouraging members to be weather watchers and plan their outings accordingly

Lightning safety is about recognising a high-risk situation and moving in time to a low-risk situation. On the water however it is recognised difficult situations may arise where there is not enough time to seek "proper shelter" resulting in a 'choice of evils' decision.