

Lightning Policy

April, May and June bring changeable weather conditions to Montana, so we must be aware of the dangers of lightning. Officials must take a conservative approach and suspend contests when the lightning/thunder "flash to bang" timing calls for it. Lightning is a serious hazard and storms can move quickly.

The NFHS has changed their lightning policy effective 2010. Essentially, the new policy says to clear the field if you can hear thunder or can see bolts of lightning, clear the field ("If you hear it, clear it. If you see it, flee it."). Keep the field clear until you have at least 30 minutes with no thunder or visible lightning.

NFHS POLICY

- a. When thunder is heard, or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play and take shelter immediately.
- b. Thirty-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or flash of lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play.
- c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30 minute count, reset the clock and another 30 minute count should begin.

Recruit the cooperation and assistance of your coaches, table crews and parent reps in monitoring conditions. The table crew and parent reps in particular can usually pay closer attention to the weather than coaches and refs, who are focused on the play-by-play. Get them to alert you to changing conditions. Discuss this at the pre-game certification with coaches and table crew.

The High School Federation rule book recommends a 30-minute delay before resuming play.

If you have to cancel a contest, note the time of game and score at suspension, and let the commissioner determine whether the game is replayed, resumed or stands as is. Do not be persuaded to continue a game if your gut tells you otherwise. Competitive people may not have the big picture in mind. They can argue for continued play, but you have the final word. As stated above, be conservative. The MLA will fully support any decision you make that errs on the side of caution.