



# Montana High School Association

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**TO: MHS SUPERINTENDENTS, PRINCIPALS AND ACTIVITIES DIRECTORS  
MOA REGIONAL DIRECTORS AND FALL SPORTS POOL LEADERS**

**FROM: BRIAN MICHELOTTI, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

**RE: INFORMATION ON SMOKE, EXCESSIVE HEAT AND LIGHTNING**

It is once again fall season in Montana and our late summer weather can lead to many areas of the state dealing with smoke in the air, with lightning delays leading to some postponements and with excessive heat issues during MHS contests/meets. With the possibility of hot temperatures and smoke throughout the fall, I have included detailed information below on dealing with these type situations. Please review this information before your next contests/meets and if you have questions, please contact the MHS office at 406-442-6010.

## **Smoke**

Smoke always a major concern during Montana high school fall activities. [Linked here](#) is the memo that was sent from Mark Beckman, MHS Executive Director to all MHS administrators. Coaches should be advised that if a practice is moved indoors, the following applies:

- Indoor practice – for an indoor practice to count as one of the initial required practices, the practice must be a comprehensive full practice including participation by all players in drills for skill development, offensive and defensive simulations, and conditioning. The practice must be similar in length to other conventional practices.

Also, [linked here are the guidelines](#) for your use in making recommendations for outdoor events during wildfire season. For more information, visit Montana's website for the Department of Environmental Quality at [www.deq.mt.gov](http://www.deq.mt.gov) or <http://todaysair.mt.gov>. Also, please be in communication with your local health department for further information/guidance regarding air quality in your specific area.

## **Timeouts during the game for heat and hydration and smoke?**

### **Football**

Football officials have the opportunity to call an official's timeout for unusual heat and the MHS is authorizing extra timeouts because of the smoke in the air. NFHS Rule 3-5-7g states an official's time-out (which is not charged to either team) occurs during a dead ball without a time-out being charged to either team for unusual heat, humidity or smoke which may create a health risk to the players.

Officials should not schedule these timeouts. In previous seasons, officials' have announced during the pregame that they would be taking a timeout during each quarter at the six minute mark for heat and hydration issues. This should not be done by the game officials. The purpose of this rule is not to pre-schedule these timeouts during a game, but to randomly have these timeouts during the game.

### **Soccer**

Soccer officials have the authority to suspend play when conditions warrant.

## 2 – Smoke, Lightning, Heat Memo

### Lightning

Lightning is often a possibility during contests/meets. Here is a summary of the NFHS / MHSAs procedures for these situations:

#### Proactive Planning

1. Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during practices and contests.
2. Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safe areas.
3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:
  - a. When thunder is heard or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the leading edge of the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play for thirty minutes 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 will reset the clock and another 30-minute count should begin.
4. Review annually with all administrators, coaches and game personnel.
5. Inform student athletes of the lightning policy at start of season.

After the clock is reset for a second time in 3c above, officials should:

- Meet with both head coaches and the contest administration. Issues such as length of drive to return home for the visitors should be considered.
- Contest administration should use every available weather resource (local news station, internet hourly forecast, lightning meters, etc.) to look at the short term forecast for the local area (See Lighting Technology below)
- Officials and contest administration should contact MHSAs staff liaisons for the particular sport
  - Brian Michelotti – (406) 465-0556 – football, golf
  - Kip Ryan – (406) 930-1047 – cross country, volleyball
  - Jo Austin – (406) 461-4415 – soccer
  - Mark Beckman – (406) 431-7245 – all activities
- Conduct periodic reviews for appropriate personnel to review the status of the lightning

***MHSAs personnel can also assist with sport-specific rules and regulations regarding delayed or terminated contests, rescheduling etc. Please contact the sport liaison for details.***

**Lightning Technology** - It is important to reinforce the lightning policy and understanding the process where contest officials, coaches and administration work together regarding suspending and resuming play. However, there are some outstanding resources available to help administrators manage their contests/meets when lightning is in the area. Here are a few lightning technology resources:

- A lightning meter – This is the most accurate way to determine the proximity of lightning in the area. This will greatly assist with your decisions for resumption of play
- Weather Bug smart phone app. Weather Bug is a smart phone app to predict the weather forecast. Within this app there is a “Spark” feature that detects if lightning is in your area. This is a very effective app for managing your games, but if you have Weather Bug, you must check what location this program uses for reporting from your area. For example, you may be in Dutton or Fairfield but the program uses the Great Falls Airport as the reporting station. In these cases, you must revert back to NFHS 30 minute policy.

If you have these technologies available when lightning is seen in the distance and if the technology accurately shows the lightning moving away from your area, the decision could be made to resume your game immediately. If you don't have the technology available such as Weather Bug or a lightning meter, you must use the NFHS policy of waiting thirty minutes between visible strikes.

The process for removing teams from the field when lightning is observed usually works well but many times fans do not leave the stadiums during these delays. It is imperative you announce that play has been suspended and the facility needs to be evacuated. [Linked are sample announcements](#) to use during your contests/meets. It is the administration's responsibility to make sure the players and students

### 3 – Smoke, Lightning, Heat Memo

have been evacuated to safe areas, but if fans do not leave the stadium, it becomes their own individual responsibility for ignoring the evacuation announcements after being notified by game administration of the risk.

In the cases of smoke or lightning, officials must work together with contest administration in these situations to ensure the proper decisions are being made for the safety of contest participants and fans. Coaches cannot make this decision, but coaches can work with administration from each school to come to a decision which will lead to mutual consent by school officials from each team. If any of these situations occur, please notify the MHSA office.