

Julie Malingowski, Meteorologist (Emergency Response Specialist), Regional Operations Center, NWS

COMPETITIVE DIVISION – PRACTITIONER

Lightning Safety Policy Needs for Outdoor Events

Part of planning any outdoor event involves being prepared for changing weather conditions. Many weather threats can negatively impact an event, with lightning a specific direct threat from nearby or approaching thunderstorms. Lightning can injure or kill anyone outdoors, and the science of detecting and predicting lightning improves as the technology and understanding of lightning advances. Further exploration ensues on how close lightning should be before evacuating, the effectiveness of distance of lightning from a venue vs consideration of time before lightning threat reaches a venue, and what risks and vulnerabilities need to be considered when safety officials make the call to evacuate or cancel an event. Though the science and technology advancements allows meteorologists to interpret moderate to high detection of lightning, the error margin may be too great to create policy for event organizers to adhere to when lightning threatens their venue. Rather, a more effective policy to create for emergency management would be to set expected communications between public officials and their patrons, as well as public officials and meteorologists.

Collaborators: Tiffany Meyer and Dr. Kevin Kloesel