

# US Youth Soccer

## Region IV

### *Position on “Environmental Conditions” During Youth Participation.*

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**Preface – Constructing a position or stand relating to ALL environmental conditions during youth soccer play is if not impossible, certainly not reasonable since one limited source cannot be the basis for every decision when dealing with accommodating youth players and teams. Therefore, this document is intended to provide general guidance for the decision making of the local organizations when a youth soccer activity is ongoing in Region IV.**

**It should be the responsibility of the local organizing committee to make the final decision on the suitability of play for any of the environmental conditions that players and teams might be exposed to during the course of an activity. The following conditions are examples of extreme environmental conditions that might occur during the course of an event in Region IV. There are numerous other events and catastrophes that may occur, but one must understand that not all potential negative environmental conditions can be addressed in one document. This document is intended as a general guide and further actions should be taken with the best interest and safety of the players, teams, parents, and spectators in mind.**

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This document will address the following environmental conditions providing a brief synopsis of the condition and the recommendation(s) for stopping play.

- 1- Emergency Planning
- 2- Lightning-Safety
- 3- Heat and Hydration Conditions
- 4- Smoke and Dust – Air Pollutants
- 5- Earthquakes
- 6- Cold Weather Conditions



## EMERGENCY PLANNING

During youth soccer activities when numerous player, parents, coaches and spectators are present the chances of some type of emergency increase with the size of the event. It is recommended that before any Region IV event is started a written emergency plan is available to the organizational and coaching staffs of all teams involved in the event.

- 1- The emergency plan should be written, comprehensive, yet flexible to deal with the needs of the participants and event staff.
- 2- Outline the titles (names if possible) of the individuals who will be responsible for making determinations regarding emergency actions.
- 3- A list of the necessary equipment and phone numbers for emergency personnel if emergency action is necessary.
- 4- A clear and concise mechanism of communication regarding any emergency actions should be outlined.
- 5- The emergency plan should be reviewed with local emergency responders to ensure response capability.
- 6- The proposed emergency plan should be reviewed and accepted by the local organizing committee medical staff and legal counsel of the sponsoring organization.

\*The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains an excellent web site titled "Natural Disasters & Severe Weather" which will be extremely helpful in setting up an emergency plan by the host organizing committee. The web address is [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/) and has much more background and further information for both preparation and responses regarding all of the environmental concerns addressed in this document.

## LIGHTNING –SAFETY

The potential for lightening to strike an individual is increased in open areas such as a soccer field. Therefore, it is imperative that the organizing committee have a plan to deal with thunderstorms and associated lightening threats.



- 1- The lightning-safety policy should establish a specific chain of command that identifies the person who has the authority to remove participants from athletic venues or activities.
- 2- The policy should include the appointment of a weather watcher at the event who actively looks for signs of developing local thunderstorms.
- 3- Stipulations within the policy should include monitoring of local weather forecasts during times of thunderstorms.
- 4- In areas that provide lightning detection technology, the technology should be routinely tested to ensure proper operation. Technology should augment not replace appointed weather watchers and monitoring of local weather forecasts.
- 5- Determine the method that will be used to stop play in the case of a lightning potential.
  - a. The National Athletic Trainers Association recommends the following “Flash-to-Bang” calculation method to ensure safety of all individuals involved. It is recommended that when lightening is calculated to be within 6 miles of an open field all participants should move to an indoor or safe place away from the open field.

**The observer begins counting or timing when a “flash of lightening” is sighted. Counting or timing is stopped when the associated thunder (bang) is heard. Divide the number by 5 to determine the distance to the lightning flash. Example, a “flash-to-bang” of 30 seconds would be equal to 6 miles.**

- 6- When the designated person determines that play is unsafe due to lightning danger the emergency plan should outline the following:
  - a. The signal for stoppage of play
  - b. Where players and others should go for safety
  - c. When play can be resumed

\*See position paper from NATA



## HEAT AND HYDRATION

When the environmental temperature is above skin temperature, athletes begin to absorb heat from the environment and depend entirely on evaporation for heat loss. Youth gathering from all parts of Region IV to participate in organized soccer events need a number of days (up to 10 days) to acclimatize to the local environmental conditions. Knowing this it is important that local organizers work diligently to provide the necessary preventative measures to reduce the possibility of heat related conditions leading to stress, injury or further complications. Because an organized event cannot be immediately be cancelled or postponed due to heat related factors in all situations local organizers should take some basic precautions when the environmental conditions warrant safety measures be implemented.

- 1- Ensure that appropriate medical care is available and that rescue personnel are familiar with exertion heat illness prevention, recognition, and treatment.
- 2- Provide shade for the teams during the match and at half time.
- 3- Allow for hydration at stoppage time(s) and add hydration breaks to each half at a minimum when temperatures exceed 98 degrees (F) accompanied with relative humidity greater than 50%.
- 4- Dark-colored clothing may cause a greater absorption of heat from the environment. Jersey selection of lighter colors should be considered when playing in high temperature locations.
- 5- Ask coaches and team managers to weigh the players before and after the match. Players should weigh close to the same weight before each match. Weight loss during hot conditions can be a result of decreased hydration status which leads to heat illnesses.

\*See position papers from NATA and USSF – Consensus statement from the Inter-Association Task Force on Exertional Heat Illnesses – Parent and Coaches Guide to Dehydration and Heat Illness (NATA)

## SMOKE AND/OR DUST IN THE ATMOSPHERE

In Region IV the potential for smoke from range or forest fires and blowing dust are potential environmental concerns for local organizers. Both smoke and dust are potentially hazardous to



the health of soccer players and those associated with coaching and spectators at the matches. When a level of smoke or dust pollutants becomes incorporated into the atmosphere the danger to players, coaches and others becomes too great to continue participation. The recommendations by the Environmental Protection Agency to cease participation are as follows:

- 1- It is recommended that when there is fire or blowing dust in the area, the local organizing committee monitor the air quality index via the government web site [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov) which will provide an air quality index ranging from “Good, Moderate, Unhealthy for sensitive groups, Unhealthy, Very Unhealthy, Hazardous” and proper warnings can be made to the participants at the event.

### EARTHQUAKES

In general, earthquakes are not common occurrences during soccer play at an organized event in Region IV. It is important to have an emergency plan from the local organizing committee in the event of an earthquake during an event. Much like the incidence of lightening the event of an earthquake requires a great deal of organization and communication.

- 1- At the first sign of an earthquake there must be a signal indicating all games are to stop and all parties involved move to a safe location. Safe locations should be designated in the emergency plan published by the local organizing committee. In the case of a soccer match the best place to move is to an open space away from buildings and power lines. During an earthquake the greatest danger is from falling debris.
- 2- Games will be restarted when the local organizing committee deems the environment safe and will be communicated to all team managers via a predetermined method.

### COLD WEATHER



Exposure to cold can produce a variety of injuries that occur as a result of the player's inability to adapt to cold. These injuries can be either a localized injury (frostbite) or hypothermia. Hypothermia occurs when the core body temperature has decreased to 95 degrees F or less.

1- Organizers of events should communicate the signs/symptoms and risk factors for hypothermia, frostbite, and non-freezing cold injuries to coaches/athletes/medical personnel.

2-Organizers should have the latest up-to-date information about current and future weather conditions before conducting training sessions or competitions

3- Cold-weather clothing is considered when temperatures and wind speed are conducive to cold weather injuries

4-The National Weather Service Wind-chill temperature index be used to estimate the relative risk of frostbite. That chart is available at [www.nws.noaa.gov/om/windchill/index](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/windchill/index).