Northeastern University Lightning Safety Policy

As Northeastern University is first and foremost committed to the safety of all student athletes, the coaching and athletic training staff must understand the dangers of lightning and how to minimize the risk of lightning associated injuries to all athletes and staff. As such, the Department of Sports Medicine at Northeastern has composed the following Lightning Safety Policy based on the National Collegiate Athletic Association Guideline 1d for Lightning Safety and the 2012 National Athletic Trainers’ Association Position Statement. Lightning is a significant health hazard in the United States estimated to result in 100 fatalities and 400-500 injuries per year by the National Severe Storms Laboratory. Although this represents a relatively low risk overall the Northeastern University Athletes are at minimally greater risk as lightning storms are more prevalent in the afternoon and early evening when the majority of our athletes are at play. The responsibility of the safety and well-being of the athletes during competition and practice is ultimately the team coaches under the advisement of the athletic trainer from the Department of Sports Medicine.

The following guidelines govern all outdoor activities and use of the Barletta Natatorium:

Designation of a weather watcher: The front desk at the entrance to the athletic training room shall have the National Weather Service (NWS) web site http://www.nws.noaa.gov/ open and checked twice daily. This responsibility is ultimately the director of sports medicine but may be delegated to assistant athletic trainers or properly trained students.

Chain of Command: In the event that a hazardous weather condition is identified, the Director of Sports Medicine, associate athletic trainer or assistant athletic trainer whoever is available in that order will contact the Athletic Director and the head coach and athletic trainer of any at-risk teams.

Education:

1. The athletic training staff and coaching staff must be aware of the National Weather Service thunderstorm “watch” and “warning” designations. A “watch” indicates that conditions are favorable for a severe storm, where a “warning” means that a storm has been reported in the area.
2. Sight or Sound: When thunder is heard or lightning seen, athletes and coaches should vacate the playing field to an identified safe location. Resumption of activities can occur one half hour after the last sound of thunder or lightning strike. At night, use both the sound of thunder and seeing the lightning channel itself to decide on re-setting the 30-minute “return-to-play” clock before resuming outdoor athletics activities.

Lightning can, and does, strike as far as 10 (or more) miles away from the rain shaft
3. Safe Shelter: All participants on the field or in the pool must find safe shelter when an unsafe lightning situation has been determined.
   a. Unsafe: The indoor pool is not a safe shelter as lightning travels very easily through plumbing. As such showers and plumbing facilities are also not safe shelters. It is not safe to use landline phones as lightning also passes easily through electrical wire. Cellular phones and radios are OK. Convertible vehicles and golf carts are not safe.
   b. Safe: The best safe shelter is a substantial fully enclosed building with plumbing, electric wiring and telephones service to ground any direct strike to the building. If this is not available a completely sealed car with the passengers not touching the metal framework is the next safest alternative.
   c. Unable to reach safety: When in a situation in which safe shelter is not easily attainable more time should be allotted and a 60 seconds (12 miles) threshold should be enforced. In the event that the participants are unable to reach a safe haven as detailed above it is important that they minimize their risk of injury. Avoid tall structures and overhanging
objects as a large number of injuries are related to indirect blunt trauma from falling objects and taller structures attract current. Also avoid metal objects (bleachers, etc.), open pools of water, open fields and being the highest object in any location. Find a thick grove of small trees surrounded by large ones and/or a dry ditch and assume a crouched position on the balls of your feet. Do not lie flat on the ground as this only increases the area in contact with the ground and therefore risk contact.

4. Emergency Response: In the event that an individual is the victim of a lightning strike they do not carry a charge and CPR and first aid should be initiated immediately. The automatic external defibrillator should be employed by those trained in its use if the victim is unresponsive without a pulse. In all cases 911 should be activated.

Evacuation plans by location:

- **Parson’s Field**: Athletes, athletic trainers and coaches to the club house. Avoid the bathrooms and showers. School and private vehicles can serve to protect overflow.

- **Henderson Boat House**: The crew teams are to exit the Charles River and seek shelter in the boathouse proper avoiding the bathrooms and showers.

- **Cabot Gymnasium**: Avoid bathrooms and showers.

- **Barletta Natatorium**: Exit natatorium and enter main gymnasium avoiding bathrooms and showers.

- **Solomon Track**: Exit track and enter adjacent satellite Northeastern University facility. School and private vehicles can serve to protect overflow.

- **Matthews Arena**: Avoid bathrooms and showers.