

AFL VICTORIA
EXTREME WEATHER POLICY
JANUARY 2017

1. Application

The *AFL Victoria Extreme Weather Policy (Policy)* applies to any *Australian Football Program, League or Association (Football Body)* that is conducted in Victoria. Players, coaches, officials, administrators and all people reasonably connected to the Football Body must comply with the Policy.

2. Policy Statement

Extreme weather and environmental factors can affect the playing of Australian Football. While environmental factors will not regularly influence whether an Australian Football Match should commence or continue to be played, occasionally extremely adverse conditions may give rise to a need to assess whether players and/or officials are in environmental danger. This policy sets out the approach that the Football Body should adopt when assessing extreme weather and environmental conditions.

3. Extreme Heat

Heat-related stress can lead to impaired player performance e.g. dizziness, headaches, collapse and illness. In its extreme form, heat can be life threatening. Preventing heat stress and injury maintains optimum performance and improves recovery. To prevent heat stress, careful planning and preparation is required.

3.1 Preliminary Assessment

The Football Body should assess the heat stress risk by reviewing information provided by the Bureau of Meteorology for the specific location of the activity. Heat stress management strategies should also be applied at all training sessions and matches.

3.2 Onus on Player

Players have a responsibility to ensure that the impact of environmental factors such as extreme heat is not exacerbated by their own conduct. Accordingly, the following general guidelines should be followed by players:

- Ensure adequate fluid intake prior to game and during game (500-700mls per quarter)
- Monitor hydration
- Notify medical and coaching staff when affected by heat or when performance is noticeably affected
- Use water and electrolyte drinks
- Use pre-game, game and post-game cooling strategies
- Do not play in the heat with an illness
- Apply sun protection factor 30+ sunscreen in high UV conditions

Clubs have a responsibility to educate players in these guidelines for personal action.

3.3 Club Responsibility

All Clubs should monitor environmental factors such as extreme heat both in matches and at any training session or activity administered by the Club. The Club should assess the heat stress risk by reviewing information provided by the Bureau of Meteorology for the specific location, and heat stress management strategies should be applied at all Club administered sessions, activities or games. The following general guidelines should be followed by Clubs:

- Use cooling aids if available – ice vests, spray bottles, sponges, fans (in rooms and on interchange bench) and shade
- Choose heat permeable jumpers and socks
- Use a Club official to be delegated the primary responsibility of monitoring and managing players for heat stress issues as they arise
- Provide adequate fluids in appropriate bottles
- Ensure trainers are fit enough to access as many players as possible during a game
- Coordinate training times/activities outside extreme conditions

3.4 Relevant Football Body Responsibility

Where possible, the Football Body should schedule Matches as much to avoid extremes of heat and allow for increased recovery from those conditions. The Football Body should also endeavour to schedule Matches at venues equipped with cooling facilities in high risk circumstances – fans, shade, air conditioning and emergency medical facilities.

In addition, the Football Body may:

- a) Increase the number of water carriers allowed to run fluids and the length of time they are allowed on the playing field
- b) Increase the length of intervals to enable teams to leave the field for the shade of the rooms at each break
- c) Reduce length of quarters
- d) Consider postponing or rescheduling games

3.5 Hot Weather and Children

On a game or training day when the forecast maximum ambient temperature at a given location is determined by the Bureau of Meteorology to be equal to or exceeding 34 Degrees Celsius, there is an extreme risk of heat related injury to children and adolescents.

When football matches or training sessions involving children and adolescents are scheduled to be conducted at times when the above conditions may prevail, those matches or training sessions should be postponed to a more suitable time, altered or cancelled.

Clubs should consider the following strategies when it is determined to undertake training sessions or matches in these conditions;

- Provide ample sunscreen for participants
- Provision of additional shaded areas for respite
- Increase supply and availability of fluids by increasing the number of water carriers entering, and the length of time they remain, on the arena
- Scheduling of game/training at a time to avoid the above conditions
- Shorten the duration of the game/training session

- In a game situation, increase the number of available interchange players

3.6 Hot Weather and Adults

On a game or training day when the forecast maximum ambient temperature at a given location is determined by the Bureau of Meteorology to be equal to or exceeding 34 Degrees Celsius, there is also risk of heat related injury to adults and appropriate preventative measures should be implemented.

When football matches or training sessions involving adults are scheduled to be conducted at times when the above conditions may prevail, the following strategies should be considered:

- Provide ample sunscreen for participants
- Provision of additional shaded areas for respite
- Increase supply and availability of fluids by increasing the number of water carriers entering, and the length of time they remain, on the arena
- Scheduling of game/training at a time to avoid the above conditions
- Shorten the duration of the game/training session
- In a game situation, increase the number of available interchange players

3.7 AFL Victoria State League & Talent Program Guidelines

The following shall be adopted when extreme heat is expected to prevail on VFL or TAC Cup program practice matches, in-season match days and training sessions. In the event that the temperature is considered likely to be greater than 32°C at:

- a) The scheduled commencement of a match, or
- b) during the course of a match

Both Club Talent/General Managers are to access the Bureau of Meteorology to determine the current temperature in the area where the match is to be played, and discuss the required options and outcomes.

Policy Process

1. Temperature equal to, or greater than 36°C at the scheduled commencement of the game:
 - a) A VFL or TAC Cup match shall not commence if the temperature at the scheduled commencement time is equal to or exceeds 36°C.
 - b) If the temperature has not dropped below 36°C within 30 minutes of the scheduled commencement time of the match, the match shall be cancelled.
2. Temperature between 32 and below 36°C at the scheduled commencement of the game:
 - a) All quarters are to be reduced to 18 minutes plus time on duration.
 - b) Umpires may increase the length of the stoppage following a goal to allow additional player/umpire hydration.
 - c) The quarter and three quarter time breaks shall be increased to 10 minutes, with the teams and umpires able to leave the field during the breaks if so desired.
 - d) The half time break shall be increased to 25 minutes.
 - e) The competing clubs shall be permitted to increase the number of interchange players by up to 2 additional players, providing that each team can add an equal number of player(s).
 - f) If the temperature exceeds 36°C during the match, the match shall be halted. If the temperature does not drop below 36°C within 30 minutes of the game being halted, the

match shall be discontinued and the result determined per the AFL Laws of the Game (Law 10.6.2).

3. Temperature below 32°C at the scheduled commencement of the game but dramatically increases during the game:

- a) If the temperature is between 32 and 36°C clauses c), d) and e) from Section 2 (above) shall apply.
- b) If the temperature exceeds 36°C during the match, the match shall be halted. If the temperature does not drop below 36°C within 30 minutes of the game being halted, the match shall be discontinued and the result determined per the AFL Laws of the Game (Law 10.6.2).

4. Extreme Cold

In conditions where extremely cold temperatures prevail, health risks exist for players not acclimatised to such conditions. It is advised that officials should note the following progressive signs of the onset of hypothermia:

- Shivering
- Cold sensation, goose bumps, confusion and numbness
- Intense shivering, lack of co-ordination and sluggishness
- Violent shivering, difficulty with speech, confusion, stumbling, depression
- Muscle stiffness, slurred speech and vision impairment

At the earliest signs of the above symptoms officials should:

- Take the participant to a dry environment and warm the player with blankets or extra dry clothing free from further exposure to the elements
- Substitute wet clothing for dry where practical
- Maintain the intake of fluids

All measures should be taken to ensure no players or officials are put at risk of serious health concerns by participating in a game or training session where extreme cold weather may be present.

When football matches or training sessions are scheduled to be conducted at times when the above conditions may prevail, the following strategies should be considered:

- Allow alterations to uniforms to provide more warmth for players
- Shorten length of quarters or training session
- Choose alternate training sessions not exposed to the weather conditions
- Cancel match or training session if weather conditions are deemed to too extreme

5. Lightning Policy

In the event of lightning being present in the immediate proximity of the venue during the course of a match or training session, play/training shall be stopped and all involved parties are to return to the pavilion.

5.1 AS1768-2007 – The Lightning Protection Standard

The Football Body should comply with AS1768-2007, entitled *The Lightning Protection Standard*, published on 10 January 2007 (**Lightning Standard**). While the Lightning Standard

will not necessarily prevent damage or personal injury due to lightning, it will reduce the probability of such damage or injury occurring. If a match is postponed or halted for a period greater than 30 minutes, the match shall be deemed incomplete and the match results are determined per the AFL Laws of the Game (10.6.2).

5.2 30/30 Safety Guideline

In the absence of specific information from weather radar or a specialised warning device then the 30/30 Safety Guideline should be used. According to the 30/30 Safety Guideline, when lightning is considered to be a possible or actual threat to an Australian Football Match the following procedures are applicable:

- a) The observation of approaching storm clouds, the first flash of lightning or clap of thunder, no matter how far away should heighten lightning awareness. The level of risk depends on one's location (direction and distance) relative to the storm cell and the direction in which the storm system is travelling.
- b) A simple method of determining the distance to the storm cell is to measure the time elapsed from when the lightning flash is observed and when the associated clap of thunder is heard.
- c) Light travels faster than sound. Assuming that the light from the flash reaches the observer instantaneously, and knowing that sound takes approximately three (3) seconds to travel one (1) kilometre, the distance can be determined by using the following rule:

Distance (in Km) = Time from observing the flash to hearing thunder (in 3 seconds)

- d) It is important to remember that lightning may be obscured by clouds so it must be assumed that when thunder is heard, lightning is in the vicinity. In such cases, careful judgment must be used to determine whether a threat exists
- e) The first part of the "30/30" rule is a guide to the postponement or suspension of activities. Most experts agree that the accepted "safe" distance from lightning is greater than 10km. This means that as the time interval between observing the flash and hearing the thunder approaches 30 seconds, all those in exposed areas should be seeking or already inside safe shelters. A storm cell with lightning activity within 10km constitutes a threat.
- f) The second part of the 30/30 rule provides the criteria for the resumption of activity. Here it is recommended that people wait a minimum of 30 minutes after the last sighting of lightning or sound of thunder. This figure is based on the observation that the typical storm moves at about 40km/h. Thus, waiting 30 minutes allows the thunderstorm to be about 20km away, minimising the likelihood of a nearby lightning strike.
- g) It is important to emphasise that blue skies and lack of rainfall are not adequate reasons to breach the 30 minute minimum return-to-activity rule.

5.3 General Lightning Safety Guideline

Increased awareness of lightning risk on a training or match day due to BOM weather warnings leading up to the activity should remain of concern for Club officials on the match day until the activity has finished. Teams and officials should proceed to the venue unless otherwise directed. If lightning is predicted within no less than 10km of the match venue at the scheduled starting time the game commencement time may be delayed by up to 60 minutes. This decision to delay or suspend play as well as resume play will be made by the Umpires based on information obtained from the BOM and discussions with the Clubs.

5.4 Club Responsibility

All Clubs competing in a competition administered by the Football Body should monitor environmental factors such as lightning both in matches and at any training session or activity administered by the Club. The Club should assess the lightning risk by reviewing information provided by the BOM. The following general guidelines should also be followed:

- a) If a lightning threat emerges, the nominated Club Official must contact all relevant staff and provide updates on a regular basis.
- b) A decision to delay, suspend or resume training or game should be made in consultation with all relevant umpires, coaching and administration staff.
- c) If players are training when the lightning threat becomes real then they should leave the training venue immediately and take shelter inside a building or metal framed car. They should not shelter under or near trees or bodies of water.
- d) Once the storm's path has been reassessed, there must be a minimum of 30 minutes elapsed before returning to play/training.
- e) When there is no access to the BOM, the "30/30" rule serves as a guide for the suspension and subsequent resumption of activities.

6. Other Extreme Weather or Environmental Conditions

In the case of any other events of extreme weather or environmental conditions, including but not limited to extremely strong winds, flood, extreme fire danger, or fires being present in the vicinity of the training session/game, consultation of all parties involved must take place to determine the safest outcome for all involved.

7. Personal Responsibility

In any case of extreme weather or environmental factors, it is the personal responsibility of each person involved; player, official, staff, spectator or volunteer, to ensure their own personal safety.

8. Prevailing Statement

Where possible, clubs should continue training or play where they are able to do so, however, player and official's safety will remain the paramount consideration. All measures should be taken to ensure no players or officials are put at risk of serious health concerns by participating in a game or training session during extreme weather or environmental conditions.