

USA TRIATHLON RACE CONTINGENCY PLAN

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This contingency plan is a guide, giving Race Directors resources available to help them follow the USAT Sanction guidelines for a possibility of delay in an event, AND to assist in compliance when developing a safety plan regarding inclement weather.

This document is prepared to assist Race Director's in making decisions regarding their individual races in the event of inclement weather. This document is not intended to be a final say in the decision making process but is designed to be a guide to assist the individual Race Director in his or her specific event. Ultimately the final decision rests in the hand of the Race Director.

I. Overview

When planning outdoor events such as triathlons and duathlons, Race Directors (RD) often fail to overlook the possibility of inclement weather. While it is true the weather is beyond the control of the RD, preparations for the occurrence of inclement weather are not. It is the responsibility of the RD to be prepared to handle the occurrence of inclement weather and to know before race day what he or she will do in the event the weather conditions become unsafe. Safety is always priority number one and should never be compromised simply to get through an event. Thus, the following document outlines steps which can be taken to insure the safety of everyone associated with the event.

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With that being said, the following document addresses various situations that may arise when planning an outdoor event and what could be done in those situations. Ultimately only four remedies exist for the Race Director in the event of inclement weather. These four options are listed below in the order recommended implementation with the first option causing the least disruption and the final option causing the most disruption to the athletes and race community:

- Change of race start time on the schedule date
- Modification of race format
- Change of race date
- Cancellation of event

Implementation of the above four situations will vary for each event and for each type of inclement weather. Also, implementation of the above four options may have

different impacts for each event. This document is not intended to be all inclusive for every possible type of weather condition but will address the major concerns experienced by most Race Directors. These weather conditions will include:

- Lightning
- Heavy Rains
- Wind/ Tornadoes
- Extreme Heat
- Ice/ Snow

All of the above conditions may occur individually or in combination (hurricanes may results in heavy rains, lightning, wind and tornadoes) but each situation will be addressed individually. It is up to the individual Race Director to make the appropriate choice in deciding which circumstance best models his or her current situation.

II. Recommendations

Each event regardless of size, geographic location or history of past weather occurrences should formalize and implement a proactive, comprehensive weather policy and emergency action plan specific to each type of weather occurrence. The components of this policy should include, at minimum, the following:

- A chain of command that specifies who is to make the call to remove individuals from the field of activity.
- A designated “weather watcher” (a person who actively looks for signs of inclement weather and notifies the chain of command if conditions become unfavorable). This person should be checking weather reports a minimum of 10 days out from the event date.
- A means of monitoring local weather forecasts and warnings. This may include the use of weather radios, internet web sites, and local radio and television stations.
- A listing of safe locations to remove participants from the hazardous weather
- The use of specific criteria for resumption and suspension of activities.

Also, it is imperative that each RD take into account several factors relating to his or her event that may come into play when making decisions about modifying the event. The RD should consider:

- The skill level of the athletes involved. Is this a pro event with athletes who are skilled in all disciplines? Or is this a beginner friendly event with athletes just hoping to complete the event?
- The emergency services being used at his event and if they will be called elsewhere in the event of inclement weather.
- The volunteer groups being used and if they will still come in inclement weather
- The parking areas and if these will be accessible in the event of inclement weather

- Any other areas of the event that may be affected by the occurrence of inclement weather

III. Communication

In the event of inclement weather clear and concise communication with all parties involved with the event is paramount. These parties include but are not limited to: race participants, race staff, local law enforcement, volunteer groups, spectators and emergency services. If the possibility of inclement weather exists each of the above groups should know exactly what will happen in the event of inclement weather. This clear communication will limit dangerous situations and will increase the comfort level of all involved. Athletes who are aware there is a plan and what will happen in each situation are more likely to understand the decisions and follow them accordingly. The same may be said for all parties associated with the event.

Several means of communication to these groups before the event include email, web page postings, phone calls and face to face meetings. Several on-site means of communication include cellular phones, short wave radio, public address systems and radio station broadcasts. Regardless of the means used, all parties must be aware of the Inclement Weather Plan and the actions to be taken under a given set of guidelines.

It also should be noted that early and clear notification of the parties involved is key when making any decision. Should a decision be warranted to alter an event in ANY way, all parties should be clearly notified as to what the change has been and how it will affect their particular duty at the event. It is up to the RD to make certain all parties involved are clear on the changes before proceeding with the start of the event.

III. Lightning

Lightning is perhaps the most common, and potentially dangerous, inclement weather condition faced by a Race Director. With most triathlons and Duathlons occurring during the summer months, lightning storms are likely to appear quickly and without warning. Lightning is one of the Top 3 causes of weather-related deaths in the US. It should be noted that certain areas have a higher propensity for thunderstorm activity including: the Atlantic seaboard, southwest, southern Rocky Mountains and the southern plains states. In the event of lightning guidelines by the NCAA and NSSL (National Severe Storms Laboratory) will be followed during events, practices, outdoor conditioning sessions and any USA Triathlon sanctioned event. The NCAA and NSSL strongly recommend terminating activity when the lightening is six miles away. There is a 7-% chance that the next cloud-to-ground strike will occur in a circular area within a six-mile radius from a previous strike.

Flash to Bang Method

It unsafe to begin any event when lightning is present in the local area. Thus, if lightning is visible at or near your race location the first step is to delay the start of the event. This delay should last as long as is necessary to insure the lightning is no longer in the vicinity. The National Athletic Trainers' Association recommends the flash-to-bang method for determining distance of the lightning strikes from your current location as it is the easiest and most convenient method for doing so (<http://www.nata.org/publicinformation/files/lightning.pdf>). This method states that one should begin counting on the lightning flash and one should stop counting when the

associated clap of thunder is heard. Then divide the time to thunder (in seconds) by 5 to determine the distance (in miles) to the lightning flash. For example, an observer obtains a count of 30 seconds from the time he spots the flash to when the thunder is heard. Thus, that lightning flash was 6 miles from the observer. The 30 second flash-to-bang count is recommended as the shortest allowable time to consider resumption of activity. As the count approaches 30 all activities should be postponed and all persons should be seeking a safe location. One other recommendation is that one uses the 30-30 rule. This rule states that if an event is suspended due to the 30 second flash-to-bang method, one should wait at least 30 minutes from the sound of the most recent thunder to resume activities.

Evacuation Plans

Evacuate to the nearby parking areas and get into cars (not convertibles) or into clumps of shrubs. Stay away from metal objects.

Points to Remember

- There can be thunder without lightning (thunder is noise resulting from the lightning discharge)
- Lightning can strike up to six miles away from the base of a thunderstorm
- Retreat to a building or car (not a convertible)
- If unable to get to a safe location, find a grove of trees (never a single tree) similar in height and crouch low on the balls of your feet with your head tucked down
- Get at least 50 feet away from metal objects
- Get away from tall objects
- Avoid small sheds that are isolated in the open
- Don't huddle together, spread out at least 100 feet
- In your hair stands on end, you hear a high pitched or cracking noise or you see a blue halo around objects there is electrical activity present that could precede a lightning strike in the area

First Aid

Athletic Trainers and Race Directors are the first responders in any emergency situation if they are not injured themselves. If someone is hit ensure they are not charged before contact with them. Begin the emergency plan (CPR if necessary, call EMS) and retreat to safety if possible. If the victim is charged stay back and call EMS immediately.

References

The above information is taken from the "Guidelines for Event Management to Use Regarding Lightning", NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook and NCAA Championships Severe Weather Policy. Also excerpts taken from the National Athletic Trainers Association Position Statement on Lightning Safety for Athletics and Recreation.

IV. Heavy Rains

Heavy rain is a very real possibility at nearly all outdoor events, especially in the summer months. While rain itself is not a danger to athletes and volunteers, rain slicked roadways, standing water and poor visibility are all dangers that may result from heavy rain fall. There is no set standard on how much rain is too much rain; the RD must rely in his instincts and on communications from the course monitors to make the decision on when the conditions are no longer safe. Local law enforcement is often a very good liaison on making the decision as to when a course is no longer safe.

V. Heavy Winds/ Tornadoes

Tornadoes and heavy winds cause a very serious threat to any outdoor activity. As with most inclement weather scenarios there is no set rule about how much wind is too much wind. So, it is up to the Race Director to work with his staff and local agencies on when conditions are unsafe. Luckily meteorologists and weather agencies have become very proficient at predicting and warning about heavy winds and tornadoes. Thus, it is wise to listen to weather forecasts leading up to your event.

In the event of heavy winds the RD should make certain no race apparatus or equipment being used will topple and cause injury to anyone in the area. This includes scaffolding, speakers, finish/ start lines, bike racks, fencing, banners, etc.

In the event of a tornado the RD should communicate with all involved that a tornado warning has been issued. All parties at the race site should be instructed to move to a safe location and take shelter, ideally in a reinforced building. All should be instructed to stay out of their cars and move into the shelter. If a shelter is not available all should be instructed to lie flat in a ditch or depression and cover their head with their hands. Suggest to all athletes to wear their helmet at all times.

VI. Extreme Heat

Many events are held in very hot and humid areas. As the distances of these events grow longer the chance for heat related issues increases dramatically. It is the responsibility of the RD to prepare for hot conditions even if past races have not seen high temperatures. The best way to prepare for this situation is by following these steps:

- 1) Alert your athletes before the event of the possibility of extreme heat via the web site or race info booklet
- 2) Provide adequate hydration options before the event to your athletes via water coolers, sports drink mix and electrolyte capsules.
- 3) Provide adequate hydration and fueling options to the athletes during the bike leg. This includes sports drinks, water, gels and/ or fruit at aid stations. The general recommendation is to have one aid station for every 15 miles of distance traveled on the bike leg. For example, your bike leg is 56 miles. You should have a minimum of 3 aid stations offering water and sports drink on your bike course. Your bike leg is 28 miles. You should have 1 aid station offering water and sports drink on your bike course. Obviously as the bike leg increases in distance and the temperatures increase, you should supply more options for hydration.
- 4) Provide adequate hydration and fueling options to your athletes during the run leg. If your race ends with the run, and the temperatures are high, you MUST have

adequate supplies on the run. Aid stations should be positioned no less than every mile and offer not only water, but sports drinks with carbohydrates, energy gels, fruits, electrolyte capsules, salty snacks, cool towels (optional), sunscreen (optional), etc. Again, if your race is a sprint distance triathlon it is not as imperative to offer many items other than water and sports drink. But if your event is an International distance triathlon or longer you must provide these items to insure your athletes make it to the finish line.

5) Provide adequate medical services at the finish line for those who need it. Athletes will push themselves beyond their breaking point in pursuit of the finish line. Providing fuel and hydration to them on the course will limit trips to the medical tent, but it will not eliminate them. If you are holding a half Ironman distance event in hot temperatures the most important aspect of your event is the medical tent. This tent must be manned with doctors and nurses. It must be prepared to issue multiple IV's to at minimum 30% of your field. It must offer cooling tents/ misters or cooling towels to help decrease body temperatures. It must offer cots AND chairs for the athletes. You must have equipment that will allow iv's to flow without the nurses having to hold them by hand. It must offer protection from the sun and on-lookers. And you must have a plan that allows each athlete to be visibly diagnosed by a nurse or doctor. This is best carried out by attaching the medical tent to the finish line and having a group of volunteers who "catch" the athletes at the finish and walk them through the medical tent to be viewed by the nurses and doctors.

6) Obtain correct water temperature readings and follow the USAT rules on wetsuits. If a water temperature is misread by two or three degrees and wetsuits are allowed in warm waters, athletes who wear them will put themselves at higher risk of dehydration later in the event. The USAT rules on wetsuits must be followed and the RD must have access to a calibrated thermometer.

VII. Ice and Snow

While the scenario of ice and snow is not a major concern to summer month triathlons, duathlons are often at risk for an ice and/ or snow storm. Ice and snow fall under similar guidelines as heavy rains, yet are much more likely to result in injury and leave less room for compromise. If ice and snow occur at an event it is suggested that the RD contact the local Department of Transportation to see what they recommend on roadway travel. Even if the DOT feels the roadways are safe for traffic, the RD should view his particular course as one small patch of ice on the roadway could cause major problems to an event.

VIII. Modifications to Event

As mentioned there are four options at the disposal of the Race Director in the event of inclement weather. These include:

- Change of race start time on the schedule date
- Modification of race format
- Change of race date
- Cancellation of event

A. Change of race start time

This is by far the most ideal option to the athlete. Athletes invest large amounts of training time, travel time and money to arrive at a race site ready to race. The option of moving the race start time later on the scheduled date minimizes the need for athletes to alter their travel plans. It keeps the race itself in tact and allows those that made the trip to that particular race site the opportunity to race. It also prevents the need for changes in qualification processes.

The major concern in this situation is on the RD and local jurisdictions (police, EMS, city, etc). Race permits are often granted based on an early race start and finish with the understanding race activities will cease by a certain time. To move the race start time means all aspects of race planning must be moved with it. A four hour delay means police must be paid for the four hours of delay on top of the time served during the actual event. This increase in pay applies to paid staff, volunteers, EMS, city jurisdictions, etc.

In order for a race to be prepared for this situation an agreement must be reached with all local jurisdictions regarding the possibility of a delay. This can easily be addressed in pre race meetings. While it may be impossible to postpone a race for many hours, a one or two hour delay should be discussed as a possibility with all parties involved with the event.

B. Modification of Race Format

This option would be used if a certain aspect of the event is found to be unsafe on race morning. If the water or roadways are unsafe, a triathlon event may be changed to a Duathlon, Swim-Run event or any combination of the three events possible. This option does allow a race to start with minimal delay and without changing the original race plans on the course actually used. If a beginning event is changed the RD must consider a wave start or time trial start, but this is a very minimal change that can be handled quite easily.

In this situation it should be very easy for a RD to have a set plan on what to do if this need arises. Alternate courses for the swim, bike and run should be available. Also, the RD should devise a written plan on what he or she would do should the swim, bike and/ or run events need to be deleted from the event.

C. Change of Race Date

If an event is scheduled for Saturday and is faced with a situation where changing the start time on the scheduled date is not an option, the next option to be considered should be moving the race to the following day, Sunday or even a date later in the year. This eliminates the need to search for a new race site and begin the process of race planning again. It allows those who came to the race site and are already in town the option of racing the same course they had planned to race. And it means no change in race planning logistics.

The major concern here is also the RD and local jurisdictions. Also, the athlete planning to fly out of town immediately following the race is to be considered. In regards to permits this option may actually be more ideal than changing the race start time on the scheduled date when considering a very long delay in start time. However, cities often have multiple events on race weekend. These may interfere with the possibility of moving the race date.

For a race to be ready for this scenario agreements must be in place with local jurisdictions. If the race is required to postpone the start until the following day the RD must have in place an agreement from the local jurisdictions they will be available to assist. This situation may be very difficult for the RD as many cities only issue permits for set dates and events have a “window of expiration” that may not fall into the following day.

D. Cancellation of Event

This is the last resort scenario. No one wants this to happen. However, the RD must realize it may be necessary to keep the racers safe. If this is the decision, the RD needs to have a prepared statement and communication line to get the word out to the local community (racers, volunteers, law enforcement, etc.) on the decision and reasons behind it. This scenario will not make anyone happy, but the anger and outrage can be quelled with the proper communication and explanation to the athletes and local community. A refund and/ or transfer policy should be set before any event so that in this scenario the athletes are clear on what they can expect to receive back from the event.

IX. Conclusion

The Event Director is the key to success at any outdoor event. It is the RD who puts in motion all aspects of the race and the one who makes all the difficult decisions. Thus, the RD needs to be prepared before an event of inclement weather. He must know the steps he will take under every possible scenario and then must follow his plan clearly and concisely. Every situation of inclement weather can be handled if the RD has a set plan on how to handle the situation. While the RD can never anticipate each possibility of inclement weather, he can put in motion his Inclement Weather Plan and use it to the best of his ability under his current situation. Yet, no matter how prepared a RD may be, he or she must be able to use his abilities of reason to make the best decision to keep all associated with the event safe.