



# PROVINCIAL WOMEN'S SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION

## HEALTH & SAFETY PROTOCOLS

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### Purpose

This document establishes health and safety protocols for P.W.S.A. sanctioned events and provides guidance for assessing and responding to environmental, medical, and safety conditions that may impact athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and spectators.

### 1. Emergency Medical and Safety Plan

A copy of the Emergency Medical and Safety Plan must be maintained at the designated medical area at the event site. Key information contained within the plan must be communicated to teams and event personnel prior to the commencement of the event.

### 2. Weather and Wind Policy

- a. Tournament Chairs shall monitor forecasted wind conditions and assess potential risks associated with wind at the tournament site, including field conditions, temporary structures, tents, signage, equipment, and spectator areas. Where applicable, Tournament Chairs should consult with field owners or facility representatives regarding known site-specific concerns.
- b. More important than play, Tournament Chair needs to consider the safety of those at the tournament. What choices can you make as a Tournament Chair to minimize the chance of injury?
  - Consider the shelters at your event. Most events have tents. If the winds are forecast to be extremely high for the weekend, you might choose to forego a tent or tents. If you do choose to have tents, there are choices and options to consider in conjunction with the tent owners. Larger frame tents can be secured to the ground with stakes (which can vary in length) into the ground or with large weights (sandbags, blocks, water barrels). Tents that aren't properly secured to the ground become very dangerous. Additionally, ask about sidewalls and the anticipated winds. Sidewalls can offer protection from the wind, but they can also become loose and flap & flail dangerously in high winds. Some sidewalls can be removed or adjusted in windy conditions. Understand your choices and make decisions with safety in mind.
  - For other tents, both those your organizing host are utilizing and those brought by vendors, teams, or spectators, communicate your expectations/requirements, including the field rules for tents & stakes (many fields have infrastructure below the surface that can be damaged). Many portable "pop-up" tents come with only very short stakes that shouldn't be relied upon to secure them in high winds. Every tent should have someone responsible for it and those persons need to be prepared to take action at your instruction. In the expectation of windy conditions, be

prepared to lower tent frames, take off tent tops, and/or take down tents completely.

- c. Wind can also cause play and safety to intersect more often. Again, you can consider pausing play should conditions warrant. Use your judgement and consult with Tournament UIC, P.W.S.A. Play-off Chair & President to determine if the conditions become unsafe or unplayable.
- d. Understand your options should high winds arise. Instruct UIC, P.W.S.A. Tournament Assistant(s), Host(s) to:
  - Confirm that everything is secure
  - Re-secure or remove any loose sidewalls
  - Lower tent frames
  - Remove tent toppers
  - Completely take down pop-up tents
  - Suspend play
  - Have everyone seek shelter

### 3. Lightning Policy

- a. All individuals participating in or observing an outdoor softball event are responsible for their own safety and should monitor threatening weather conditions. Before each practice, warm-up time or game, the home plate umpire should appoint an individual as the designated weather watcher. If the home plate umpire is the only official at the event, then the home plate umpire should be responsible for the duties of the weather watcher. The individual will make the call to stop play, remove individuals from the field, and announce a warning to the spectators.
- b. The designated weather watcher shall monitor weather conditions and forecasts throughout the event. Weather information should be obtained from reliable sources, including Environment and Climate Change Canada weather alerts and local weather information. All severe weather warnings and watches should be taken seriously.
- c. When the weather becomes dangerous, the designated weather watcher will announce that all play activities are suspended and all individuals, both players and spectators, should seek appropriate shelter. No place is absolutely safe from lightning threat; however, some places are safer than others. Large, enclosed structures (substantially constructed buildings) tend to be safer than smaller structures or open structures. In general, a fully enclosed vehicle with the windows rolled up tends to be safer than being outside so long as contact with metal surfaces inside and outside the vehicle is avoided. The following areas are not appropriate shelter and should be avoided:
  - i. Any area of higher elevation - wide-open areas such as sports fields, tall isolated objects such as flag poles, light poles, or trees, metal fences and metal bleachers, unprotected open buildings like dugouts, picnic pavilions, rain shelters and bus stops.
- d. When determining whether or not to suspend play, the designated weather watcher should use common sense and good judgment. If a thunderstorm appears imminent before or during an activity or contest (regardless of whether lightning is seen or thunder heard), postpone or suspend the activity until the hazard has passed. Signs of imminent thunderstorm activity are darkening clouds, high winds and thunder or lightning. Even storms that are many miles away can pose a lightning danger. This may mean the

appropriate decision is to suspend activities even before the first sight of lightning or sound of thunder.

- e. All individuals should have the right to leave an athletic site or activity, without fear of repercussion or penalty, in order to seek a safer structure or location if they feel they are in danger from impending lightning activity. Safety is the number one consideration; the activity can be made up later.
- f. If activity has been suspended due to lightning, the designated weather watcher should wait at least 30 minutes after the last lightning flash or sound of thunder prior to resuming activity. Each time additional lightning is observed, or thunder is heard, the minimum 30-minute waiting period should be reset. A clear sky or lack of rainfall are not adequate indicators for resuming play. The minimum 30-minute return-to-play waiting period should not be shortened. Play should not be resumed even after the 30-minute waiting period if any signs of thunderstorm activity remain in the area or if the weather forecast indicates the threat is not over. If lightning is observed and thunder is heard within 30 seconds, this will be the determining factor for suspending play. This is what is referred to as the “30/30” rule.
- g. NO LIGHTNING SAFETY GUIDELINES CAN GUARANTEE ABSOLUTE SAFETY. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERY PERSON TO BE AWARE OF WEATHER CONDITIONS AND TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION TO BE SAFE. USE COMMON SENSE AND GOOD JUDGEMENT. PLAN AHEAD AND MAKE SAFETY YOUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY.
- h. For additional information regarding severe weather threats and lightning safety, refer to Environment and Climate Change Canada weather resources.

#### 4. Extreme Hot and Cold

- a. The health and safety of athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and spectators shall be the primary consideration when evaluating extreme heat conditions.
- b. Tournament Chairs shall monitor local weather conditions, including temperature, Humidex, and any Heat Watches or Heat Warnings issued by [Environment and Climate Change Canada](#). Tournament Chairs may reference the Environment and Climate Change Canada Extreme Heat Events and Heat Warnings guidance when assessing conditions and determining appropriate safety measures.
- c. When the humidex is between 35 and 39, the following precautions should be considered:
  - Encourage athletes to hydrate before, during, and after games.
  - Permit additional water breaks as required.
  - Encourage athletes, coaches, and officials to seek shade whenever possible.
  - Monitor participants for signs of heat-related illness.
  - Consider schedule adjustments where practical to provide additional recovery time between games.
- d. When the humidex is between 40 and 42, the Tournament Chair shall assess conditions and may recommend one or more of the following measures:
  - Mandatory water breaks during games.
  - Delayed game starts.
  - Extended intervals between games.
  - Reduced warm-up periods.

- Temporary suspension of play until conditions improve.

Any modification to the tournament schedule, postponement of games, or extended suspension of play must be approved by the P.W.S.A. Playoff Chair and P.W.S.A. President.

- e. When the humidex exceeds 42, the Tournament Chair shall immediately notify the P.W.S.A. Playoff Chair and P.W.S.A. President. Play may be suspended until conditions improve and approval to resume has been granted by the P.W.S.A. Playoff Chair and P.W.S.A. President.
- f. The Tournament Chair is responsible for monitoring weather conditions and communicating concerns to the P.W.S.A. Playoff Chair and P.W.S.A. President.
- g. Where an immediate safety concern exists, the Tournament Chair has the authority to temporarily suspend play pending consultation with the P.W.S.A. Playoff Chair and P.W.S.A. President.
- h. The P.W.S.A. Playoff Chair and P.W.S.A. President have the authority to approve additional heat-related precautions, delay games, modify schedules, postpone games, suspend play, or implement other measures deemed necessary to protect the safety of participants.
- i. Athletes, coaches, and team personnel are encouraged to remain hydrated, seek shade whenever possible, and monitor themselves and others for signs of heat-related illness. Any participant experiencing symptoms of heat-related illness should immediately notify a coach, official, or tournament representative and seek appropriate medical attention.

## 5. Air Quality

- a. The best scientific information available is used for these guidelines. It will be updated as new knowledge becomes available. This guideline document includes background information about the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI), asthma management, and exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB).
  - i. Check the Environment and Climate Change Canada Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) website for current air quality conditions: - [https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/provincial\\_summary/on\\_e.html](https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/provincial_summary/on_e.html)
  - ii. Click on the name of the community the activity is taking place in or on the AQHI station name.
  - iii. Note the station, time, and date, and Index calculation.
  - iv. Updates usually occur hourly (at the top of the hour).
  - v. Use the index calculation that is within one hour of scheduled start time for a game or training session if available. If it is not available, use forecasted maximums.
    - If the AQHI reading is “1-3 (low), continue with activity as normal.
    - If the AQHI is “4-6” (moderate), then go to step 4, 5, or 6 as appropriate.
    - If the AQHI is “7” or higher then go to steps 7 or 8 as appropriate.
  - vi. AQHI 4-6: Tournament play
    - 1. Due to multiple games in a tournament, when the AQHI is “4-6”, consider delaying start of next game and/or breaking in-between innings.
  - vii. AQHI 4-6: Games

1. A league game should continue as scheduled.
- viii. AQHI 4-6: Practices and training
  1. Be prepared to adjust the practice by:
    - a. Reducing the intensity.
    - b. Reducing the duration of the practice.
    - c. Providing resting periods.
- ix. AQHI 7 or higher: Games and tournaments
  1. If the game organizer/host has not cancelled games in advance, all teams, spectators and officials/umpires should arrive ready to play.
  2. If the AQHI is still above “7”, the teams involved, the umpires/officials or tournament convener (if applicable) should consider delaying start or cancelling the game.
  3. When present, the UIC and tournament convener reserve the final right to cancel the game if the conditions are considered dangerous, in their opinion.
  4. If games are cancelled, teams are to report to the convener the reason for cancellation with the Index calculation, time & date, number calculated and AQHI station used.
  5. If air quality changes dramatically during a game (e.g., sudden smoke event caused by wind direction change) coaches, officials, and convener/organizer are advised to use their discretion. Record all decisions and relevant information when submitting game information.
- x. AQHI 7 or higher: Practices and training
  1. Team officials should consider a rescheduled practice or postponing practice until a later time.

b. Additional Information

- i. Be aware of weather and other conditions:
  - Current forest fires and their locations in the province.
  - Local burning of stubble on fields or agricultural fields – these can increase particulate matter in the air without impacting the AQHI for a city.
  - Sudden and dramatic changes in wind strength and direction.
  - Proximity of any major road or highway.
  - Near or downwind of any industrial areas or other significant emission sources.
- ii. Some provincial and territorial health services maintain an Air Quality Advisory website that can be used.
- iii. The AQHI is a web-based, risk management tool which describes a local reading of air quality as it relates to human health. While the Index number for a location can rise into the triple digits, anything over “7” is of primary concern.
- iv. Health Canada recommends that for strenuous activities, one should reschedule events if the AQHI is 7 or above.
- v. The AQHI treats anything above 10+ as “Very High” with health messages for the “general” and “at risk” populations to reschedule all outdoor activities – strenuous or not.
- vi. Elite athletes are in the “at-risk population because of the intensity and duration of exposure to outdoor air quality.” Young children and seniors are more sensitive to air pollution. Additionally, women appear to be more affected than men due to smaller airways, lungs, and respiratory systems.
- vii. Regarding air quality, Softball is considered a high exposure sport.

- viii. Individuals tend to rely on sensory perception to evaluate air quality when, in fact, the pollutants that present the greatest harm to human health are difficult to see or smell (e.g., ground level ozone).
- ix. Exercise-Induced Bronchospasm (EIB) is a sudden narrowing of the airways in response to vigorous exercise. It may occur in some individuals who have no pre-existing diagnosis of asthma. Most obvious symptoms of EIB include wheezing, prolonged shortness of breath, tightness in chest, coughing, extreme fatigue, and chest pain.
- x. Asthma sufferers should have it under control before exercise (no coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, etc.) and no other respiratory concerns (common cold, etc.). According to studies, asthma is now twice as prevalent in elite athletes as the general population. Symptoms of severe asthma emergency include struggling to breathe, rescue inhaler does not help, cannot speak/finish sentences, nostrils flaring out, fainting, severe fatigue, blue lips and nails, and unconsciousness.

## 6. Sideline Safety

- a. P.W.S.A. Tournament personnel have the authority to relocate or remove objects, equipment, or spectators from areas adjacent to the playing field if, in their opinion, conditions pose a safety risk to players, staff or spectators.

## 7. Concussion Safety & Awareness

- a. Please refer to P.W.S.A. Concussion Protocols Policy

## 8. Hospitalization

- a. If an athlete participating in a P.W.S.A. sanctioned event receives medical treatment at a hospital, medical clinic, or physician's office, or is referred for medical assessment by event medical personnel, the athlete shall not return to competition during that event until medical clearance has been provided by a qualified medical professional.

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