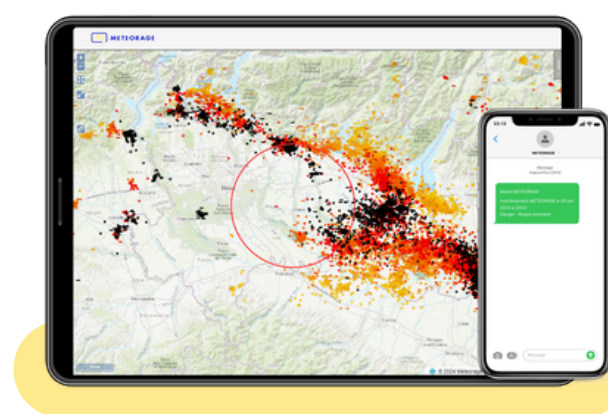


FRANCE-IRAQ: DECISIONS THAT MUST LEAVE NOTHING TO HAZARD

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Following the interruption of the France-Iraq match due to a thunderstorm, this episode highlights that lightning risk management in outdoor sports relies on decisions that must leave no room for improvisation. In our latitudes, the risk remains relatively limited, with fewer than ten fatalities per year in France, which can sometimes lead to it being underestimated. However, accidents do occur and are most often linked to a lack of anticipation or awareness.

The analysis of more than 10 years of lightning-related accidents in Europe (215 cases studied, including 56 in France), carried out in collaboration with the National School of Meteorology (Météo-France), shows that 60% of victims were engaged in outdoor leisure activities and that 11% of accidents occurred in stadiums or sports facilities. It also highlights that the majority of thunderstorms responsible for accidents could have been anticipated, often more than 30 minutes in advance.



The critical point does not lie solely in the decision to interrupt an activity, but also in determining when it can be resumed. Many accidents occur when the thunderstorm appears to move away or weaken, creating a false sense of safety. This is precisely why the 30-minute rule remains essential to frame the resumption of activities.

In response to these findings, the United States has evolved its practices by combining awareness campaigns and operational protocols. Messages such as “When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors” have promoted simple individual reflexes, while alert systems have been installed in many public venues, including schools. At the same time, rules for stopping and resuming activities have been harmonized, particularly in university sports.

These approaches are based on a fundamental principle: decisions cannot rely solely on human perception. Visual and auditory signals are inherently variable and sometimes misleading. While they remain useful at an individual level, they are not suited to managing the safety of a group or a stadium. Risk management must therefore rely on accurate detection, real-time monitoring of thunderstorm activity, and predefined protocols, so as to leave no room for improvisation, particularly when resuming activities.

Today, contrary to common assumptions, many stakeholders in Europe already apply these protocols. Detection and alert systems facilitate decision-making and ensure a consistent application of safety rules.

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*Source: Analysis of 10 years of lightning-related human accident data in France and Europe ([10.37053/lameteorologie-2022-0011](https://doi.org/10.37053/lameteorologie-2022-0011))