

## Lightning Kills



[Reuters]

BOGOTA, Colombia -- A Colombian soccer player who competed in the 1994 World Cup was killed Thursday when he was struck by lightning during practice.

The death of 32-year-old Hermam Gaviria was announced by the Valle de Lili hospital. Four other players on Deportivo Cali were injured and hospitalized.

One of them, Giovany Cordoba, had three heart attacks and was in critical condition, doctors at the hospital said.

Practice had just begun when the afternoon storm hit. Teammates tried to revive Gaviria on the field before taking him to the hospital.

"I was saved by a miracle," teammate Mauricio Espinosa said. "I was only five meters from Hermam." Francisco Henao, a fan, was watching practice at the time.

"It was a surprise storm," he said. "The lightning strike hit the post and then the field." Gaviria, a halfback, played for Colombia's national team in the 1994 World Cup in the United States and in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. He played in Japan before recently joining Deportivo Cali.

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### ***Advice to Coaches, Referees, and Club Officials***

#### **Lightning Safety Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to provide information to those responsible for making decisions about suspending and restarting games based on the presence of lightning.

The current recommendation of the National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL) is to consider terminating play when the lightning is six miles away (flash-to-bang time of 30 seconds or less). This recommendation was developed as a practical way to make a judgment in situations where other resources such as technology and instrumentation are not available.

As a minimum, NSSL staff strongly recommends that by the time the flash-to-bang count is 30 seconds; all individuals should have left the game site and reached a safe structure or location.

In addition, a smaller, but still real, risk exists with the presence of lightning at greater distances. Unfortunately, current science cannot predict where within the radius the next strike will occur.

The existence of blue sky and the absence of rain are not protection from lightning. Lightning can, and does, strike as far as 10 miles away from the rain shaft. It does not have to be raining for lightning to strike.

The flash-to-bang method is the easiest and most convenient way to estimate how far away lightning is occurring. Thunder always accompanies lightning, even though its audible range can be diminished because of background noise in the immediate environment and its distance to the observer. To use the flash-to-bang method, count the seconds from the time the lightning is sighted to when the clap of thunder is heard. Divide this number by five to obtain how many miles away the lightning is occurring.

When considering resumption of a game, NSSL staff recommends that everyone ideally should wait at least 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning or sound of thunder before returning to the field of activity.

If available, electronic detection devices should be used as additional tools to determine the severity of the weather. However, such devices should not be used as the sole source when considering terminating play. (Information taken from the NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook and NCAA Championships Severe Weather Policy).