

Look Out for Lightning on the Links!

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Editors note: Thanks to Ken Krausz, editor of The GREENERSIDE (Official Publication of the GCSA of New Jersey) for permission to reprint this article on lightning. It sure got my attention when I read it, and I am sure it will initiate some conversation at your club and among fellow superintendents as well.

According to the *New Jersey Law Journal*, a New Jersey court has passed down the nation's first known ruling that lightning is not an act of God when it hits a golfer. The court cited breakthroughs in engineering and forecasting that have given golf courses the capability to protect golfers from lightning. Therefore, though courses don't have an affirmative duty to protect their patrons from lightning, they are liable if they establish protective systems and the systems don't work. The opinion suggests that courses can escape liability if, in effect, they decline to interpose themselves between God and golfers.

In this case, the Atlantic City Country Club's practice was to monitor the weather, and it had an evacuation plan that consisted of the golf course personnel driving onto the course to warn golfers. According to the defense,

a United States Golf Association (USGA) poster placed in the clubhouse recommended immediate reaction to dangerous situations and advised golfers to *seek shelter if you feel danger from lightning or storm is imminent*. In March

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1993, a foursome on the course noticed lightning and began walking toward the clubhouse (there were no man-made shelters along the way). The plaintiff put up an umbrella and was subsequently

struck by lightning. He survived, but was injured and sued the club and its owners.

This case sets new precedence that lightning is increasingly falling into the category of hurricanes and tornadoes—disasters that have become more predictable. All managers should consider their options and research the expense associated with installing a warning system and shelters. ■

Note: Lightning Safety posters (14" x 20") are available through the USGA for \$1 each, or \$75 per 100. Lightning Safety Tips stickers (4" x 6") are available for \$2.50 per package of 20. To order these materials, please call the USGA at (908) 234-2300.

