

Emergency Preparedness & The PA Announcer

In response to a changing world around us, schools are implementing emergency action plans – not just for the school day – but for after-school activities where large groups of people can gather and which present a variety of different security challenges – especially for outdoor events.

For the Public Address Announcer, this means having and knowing when to utilize scripts that go beyond telling spectators to stay off the floor and how to address injuries which delay the action on the playing surface (We have included examples for such situations here). The PA Announcer can be the key vehicle in delivering critical messaging as part of an entire team of game management personnel.

It should **not** be the responsibility of the PA Announcer to develop scripts, or for that matter, make the final decision of when a script is read in an emergency. Those should be the responsibility of the school administration.

There can be preset protocols for things like a lost child or paging someone to a specific location. But some emergency situations that affect the entire crowd, possibly prompting the evacuation of the venue, must be triggered at the top of the game management chain and should be included in the school's emergency action plan. Those situations include: Weather, Bomb or Terrorist Threat, Fire, Medical Incidents, Gas Leaks, Drive-By Shooter or Active Shooter in Vicinity, Power Outage.

The first thing the PA Announcer must do is be calm; and present clear information to move people to safety. Providing visual references to direct people as opposed to directions is important (i.e. "Proceed to the gate near the scoreboard," instead of "Go to the gate at the North end of the field.")

The bottom line is to be prepared. Know the action plan. Have scripts for various situations prepared in a binder by your side at all times.

The information that follows comes from the MHSAA's Athletic Activities Emergency Preparedness Planning Strategy document, which can be found on the MHSAA Website. The document provides encouragement for schools to develop an emergency action plan to be prepared for enhancing the safety of game participants and spectators when a critical incident occurs.

Special thanks as well to the National Association of Sports Public Address Announcers, which also covers emergency readiness in its book, *The Voice Above The Crowd*, a training manual used by PA Announcers across the country.

Pre-Game

It is recommended that an announcement encouraging people to be aware of their surroundings and to report things they may think suspicious to the game management. Here's an example of such a script, which should be read once or twice during pre-game and once at halftime:

See Something-Say Something (You may wish to adjust reporting location)

Welcome to _____ High School. For your safety and security, the Athletics Department and School Administration encourage you to be aware of unusual activity. Please report any suspicious activity to us here at the announcer's stand ***immediately***. Enjoy the game and remember – Report Suspicious Activity – See Something – Say Something!

During pre-game, the announcer may wish to consult with the game manager regarding potential severe weather or other known threats. It may be decided to use one of the following scripts prior to the start of the game to inform spectators of the protective plans in place:

Weather Threat

May I have your attention please. We have been watching the potential of approaching inclement weather. If it arrives during the game, activity will cease until we have determined it is safe. If we need to evacuate the stadium/gym/arena/field, we will advise you to seek appropriate shelter in the school and follow directions from staff. If you wish, seek shelter in your vehicle. Thank you for your cooperation.

Safety Plan

May I have your attention please. The (school district name) has an emergency plan to keep our students, staff, parents and visitors as safe as possible. If an emergency should occur during the game/event and we need to stop the event to evacuate or take shelter, we will advise you to seek appropriate actions and follow directions from staff and/or event volunteers. If you wish, seek shelter in your vehicle. Thank you for your cooperation and enjoy the contest.

During The Event

During outdoor competition, once the official signals to suspend activity because of weather, the announcer could announce:

Weather Delay

May I have your attention please. We have been notified of approaching inclement weather. Activity will cease until we have determined it is safe and the risk of lightning is diminished. We advise you to seek appropriate shelter in the school, follow directions from staff. If you wish, seek shelter in your vehicle. Thank you for your cooperation.

If during an indoor event, host management determines an evacuation is appropriate, the announcer could announce:

Building Evacuation

May I have your attention please. Due to an emergency situation in the school, we are evacuating the building. Activity will cease until we have determined it is safe and the risk has been resolved. Please follow directions from staff, exit the school and move away from the building. Responding police/fire personnel will provide further instructions. Thank you for your cooperation.

If host management determines Shelter-In-Place is appropriate, the announcer could announce:

Shelter-In-Place

May I have your attention. Due to an emergency situation in the school, (approaching inclement weather, hazardous materials incident, etc.) activity will cease until we have determined it is safe and the risk has been resolved. We will be taking shelter inside the school, please follow directions from staff:

- Remain in the building; you are free to move around or,
- Quickly move to shelter areas in the building.

Responding police/fire personnel will provide further instructions. Thank you for your cooperation.

Keeping Spectators Off The Floor

A “Stay Off The Playing Surface” announcement should be a script the PA Announcer always has at the ready. Here’s a good example to use when it appears fans may be preparing to rush the playing surface:

Stay Off The Playing Surface

Ladies and gentlemen, for your safety and the safety of the participants, we ask your cooperation in not going on the playing surface before, during or after the game. Violators will be removed from the premises and risk prosecution. Thank you.

Injured Players

An injured player down on the playing surface during a game should only be identified by the PA Announcer. The Announcer is in no position to speculate about the injury and should not talk while being attended to by medical personnel. Do not fill the time with music or announcements. Here’s an example of an appropriate acknowledgement of an injured player if you can positively identify the student:

Injured Player

The injured player down on the field is #2, Dylan Lewis.

And when the player is recovered and leaving the field, an announcement encouraging support from the fans is not necessary. This will take place naturally. Again, any announcement speculating about the injury is inappropriate.