

Triathlon Ireland Guide to Managing Adverse Weather at Events

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The purpose of this document is to give Event Organisers guidance and advice to use in preparation for, and to deal with, bad weather conditions at their event, to ensure the safety of all competitors and event staff, volunteers and spectators.

This document is to assist the Event Organiser decision making processes in the event of inclement weather, however this is not intended to be the definitive and applicable in all situations. Ultimately, Event Organisers have a duty of care to ensure their event is safe for competitors to take part in.

The key to effectively managing a change in your event due to bad weather is an effective decision making process and good communication. The Event Organiser needs to be prepared for bad weather, and have a clear understanding of how various different conditions could affect the event. Communication should be accurate, concise and timely, to avoid confusion and manage people's expectations.

Event Organisers aren't expected to predict the weather, but if properly prepared you can tackle the unexpected effectively and reduce the stress caused to themselves and others.

When planning outdoor events such as triathlons, duathlons and aquathlons, it is easy to overlook the possibility of inclement weather. While it is true that the weather is beyond the control of the Event Organiser, preparations for the occurrence of inclement weather are not.

It is the responsibility of the Event Organiser to be prepared to handle the occurrence of inclement weather and to know before race day what will be done in the event the weather conditions become unsafe. Safety is always the top priority and should never be compromised simply to get through an event. Thus, the following document outlines steps which can be taken to insure the safety of everyone associated with the event.

This guidance addresses various situations that may arise when planning an outdoor event, and what could be done in those situations. Ultimately only four remedies exist for an Event Organiser in the event of inclement weather. These four options are listed below in the order of suggested implementation - with the first option causing the least disruption and the final option causing the most disruption to the athletes and race community:

- Change of race start time (on the scheduled date)**

- Modification of race format**

- Change of race date**

- Cancellation of event**

The decision to implement any of the above four situations will vary for each event and for each type of inclement weather. Also, implementation of the above four options may have different impacts for each event. This document is not intended to be all inclusive for every possible type of weather condition, but will address the most common major concerns. These weather conditions will include:

- Flooding**

- Heavy rains**

- High wind**

- Extreme heat**

- Extreme cold, ice and snow**

All of the above conditions may occur individually or in combination, but each situation will need to be addressed individually. It is up to the individual Race Director to make the appropriate choice in deciding which circumstance best applies to the situation.

The organisation of any event regardless of size, geographic location or past weather history should give consideration and plan for adverse weather conditions, both in the lead up to and on the day of their event. The larger the event, the more comprehensive these plans should be. Components of this planning should include:

A chain of command that specifies who is the decision maker in the event of adverse weather conditions that affect the running of the event.

A means of monitoring weather reports and forecasts in the lead up to the event, this should start a minimum of 10 days before the event.

An established means of communication with local emergency services, road management services and venue owners (especially for triathlons and aquathlons regarding water quality).

Contingency plans should parts of the event become cancelled, or facilities such as car parks become unusable.

A communications strategy with competitors both before and during the event, to effectively issue information on any actions to be taken.

When considering what action to take, Event Organisers should consider several factors related to their event that could influence the decision making process:

The skill level of the athletes involved - novice triathletes may be more susceptible to adverse weather conditions than elite athletes.

Whether the first aid provision in place is capable of coping with the increased risk of harm because of the weather conditions.

Whether local emergency services being used at the event will be called elsewhere because of the weather conditions.

Where volunteers and marshals are being used and if they will still attend because of the weather, and if they do their safety and welfare.

Any venue facilities that are adversely affected by the weather such as overflowing lakes or flooded car parks.

The effect of adverse weather on course safety.

Your appointed Technical Official can also be used as a source of information and guidance, as they may make helpful suggestions on what actions could be taken.

In the event of inclement weather, clear and concise communication with all parties involved with the event is paramount. These parties include but are not limited to:

| **Event participants**

| **Volunteer groups**

| **Event staff**

| **Spectators**

| **Local emergency services**

If the possibility of inclement weather exists, each of the above groups should know exactly what will happen in the event of inclement weather. This clear communication will limit dangerous situations and will increase the understanding of all involved. Competitors who are aware there is a plan and what will happen in each situation are more likely to understand the decisions and follow them accordingly. It is also recommended to inform competitors of when a final decision will be made.

Several means of communication to these groups before the event include email, web page postings, social media, phone calls and face to face meetings. On-site means of communication include mobile phones, public address systems and radio station broadcasts. Regardless of the means used, a clear and consistent message must be used to avoid confusion.

It also should be noted that early and clear notification of all the parties involved is key when making any decision. Should a decision be warranted to alter an event in ANY way, all parties should be clearly notified as to what the change has been and how it will affect their particular duty at the event. It is up to the Event Organiser

to make certain all parties involved are clear on the changes before proceeding with the start of the event.

As part of your contingency planning, consider having a number of draft communications prepared which can be released as necessary.

Competitor Communications in Advance of Your Event

Communicating with your competitors and event staff before the event can save you a lot of hassle at the event itself. It makes them aware that you have a plan in place, and removes the element of surprise if you inform them what actions you may have to take if something unexpected happens, it also allows them to prepare properly.

THESE PRE-EVENT ACTIONS COULD INCLUDE:

Put in place event terms and conditions which include:

- Refund/transfer of entry policy
- Your right to modify the event or Event cancellation policy
- “Force majeure” statement

What will happen in the event the swim is cancelled (new race format)

Local traffic information and link to traffic website

Likely weather conditions and link to weather website

Details of alternative parking arrangements

Flooding

Flooding can not only affect an event on the day, but can also be an issue in the lead up to the event. If there is heavy rain in the lead up to your event, this could result in the level of the lake or river you are using rising, and there is also danger that the water can become contaminated, especially where run off from adjacent fields is high.

If the body of water you are using is subject to significant flooding or level change you should carry out a water test to ensure the water quality is still acceptable. If it is not you should either consider cancelling the swim or move the date of the event.

Flooding can also affect you during the event, and is not limited to the body of water you are using. Roads can become flooded on your course, making them impassable to cyclists. These points on the course can be identified and the course re-routed, or contingency routes planned. Flooded roads not directly affecting your course should also be considered, if traffic is re-directed from flooded roads onto roads you are using for your route, unexpected traffic could occur on your course affecting the safety of competitors.

As many venues are based beside a body of water, it makes them inherently vulnerable to flooding. When you are designing your site, including transition, finish and car parking you should consult with the venue owner to avoid areas that flood regularly. If you cannot avoid them (especially car parks) contingency plans should be made.

Heavy rain

Heavy rain is a real possibility at any outdoor event all year round. While rain itself is not a danger to athletes and volunteers, wet roads, standing water and poor visibility are all very real dangers.

It is very difficult to quantify how much rain is too much, so it falls to the Event Organiser to use their judgement, and communications from on the course to decide when conditions are no longer safe.

Volunteers are susceptible to prolonged periods of rain, so provision should be made to ensure that all volunteers have waterproof clothing or shelter, adequate communication lines to the Event Organiser or Team Leader, and access to hot drinks and food.

High wind

High winds can cause very serious problems at events. Organisers should ensure that all event equipment and infrastructure is sufficiently secured and not likely to topple. An understanding of wind loading limits for structures such as gantries and gazebos would be recommended, and purchasing an anemometer (to measure wind speeds) may assist with making decision.

Exposed courses can become a danger to competitors if they get caught by unexpected gusts of wind, so advice should be given to competitors regarding the use of disc wheels and the danger of riding too close to other competitors.

Specific Weather Advice

High winds can also cause difficulty with the swim course, as rough water can be very difficult to swim in, and swim buoys may move due to the wind.

Again, it is very difficult to quantify when winds get dangerously high, so it is down to the Event Organiser's judgement to decide when competitors safety is at too much of a risk.

Extreme Heat

Whilst not likely to happen often in Ireland, endurance events taking place in high temperatures pose a significant risk to competitors. The risk increases as the distance of the race increases, as does the requirement for increased competitor support.

Hot weather can be unpredictable, so it is the responsibility of the Event Organiser to ensure sufficient provision is made in their planning to cope in this instance. If you become aware that the weather will be hot, you should advise competitors accordingly, to ensure they hydrate properly before the event, you should also inform staff and volunteers to come prepared for these conditions.

Water temperature is important, if the water is too warm competitors could easily overheat and dehydrate whilst swimming. Wetsuits are forbidden above 22°C for sprint and standard distance triathlons. For longer swims it may be prudent to offer a feed station at a point on the swim course, at a point where they can exit the water.

For the bike, athletes obviously are able to take water out with them, however for long courses they may well run out of fluids. Provision should be made out on the course so that they can refill their water bottles, or collect additional bottles. It may also be wise to provide sports drinks and gels out on the course. As a minimum, competitors should be able to access additional drinks every 20miles or 30km.

Similarly for the run, aid stations should be positioned out on the course. The longer the run, the more frequent the stations should be. They should be provide water, sports drinks and energy gels. On course showers can also be provided to aid the runners.

When an event is run in hot weather, the most crucial point is the finish. Often competitors will push their bodies to breaking point, finishing on adrenalin alone. Because of this competitors may well be exhausted at the finish line, hot weather will only make this situation worse.

A medical area should be provided at the finish line, along with a good supply of water and sports drinks. It is also advisable to have a shaded area for competitors to escape the sun.

If very hot weather is expected, you should ensure that your medical cover provides sufficient IV drips to cover the size of your field, and have an effective way of transporting competitors to hospital without reducing the medical capacity at the event.

Extreme Cold, Ice and Snow

Ice and snow poses similar problems to heavy rain, in that it can make roads slippery/icy and is often accompanied by poor visibility. To get a better idea of road conditions you should make contact with the highway agencies and the police.

Having an understanding of what routes are cleared or gritted may assist with your decision, but be mindful that conditions may change very quickly or routes may re-freeze. Remember, that it only takes one small patch of ice on the course to cause a significant risk to competitor safety.

Additional clothing should be considered and competitors advised on what you expect them to bring, for example full body and arm coverage, gloves, hats etc. There is no restriction on wearing gloves and hats for the cycle and run segments of triathlon and multisport events. You can update at the briefing what is strongly advised as it might be colder/warmer by the time the race starts.

Consider holding your briefings and prize presentations inside a building if possible, and if your event is in a rural local, consider whether you can make use of temporary infrastructure to shelter people at your site.

Ensure your medical team is sufficiently equipped for cold conditions with a large stock of foil blankets, warm drinks, and a sheltered warm area to treat people.

Don't forget to include your marshals in this assessment, and let them know what you expect them to bring, for their comfort and safety.

Change of Race Start Time

This is the best option for the competitor because they invest time in preparing for the race, travelling to the venue, and the expense of the event. This option minimises the need to an athlete to change their travel plans, or on the day preparation, whilst still providing them with the race they were expecting.

The major considerations of this change that need to be actioned by the Event Organiser are:

- | **Ensuring that venue owners are informed and agree.**
- | **Ensuring local police and councils are informed and agree.**
- | **Ensure all competitors are properly informed.**

One key negative to this action is that many events start early in the morning to avoid significant traffic disruption, therefore it is vital the decision is made in conjunction with the authorities, possibly through the Safety Advisory Group. You should also look at how the increased traffic levels will affect competitor safety, and take appropriate steps to maintain a safe event. The possibility of a delayed start should be discussed with the relevant authorities prior to the event, highlighting that the reason for the change is based around competitor safety.

In your pre-event information and your event terms and conditions, you should state that you as the Event Organiser have the right to change or modify any aspect of your event to maintain competitor safety. This will make your competitors aware that things may change if the conditions require it.

Modification of Race Format

This option is used if a certain aspect of the event is unsafe, typically either the swim or the bike. If the swim is cancelled then the event can become a duathlon, potentially using the planned run route to give a first run segment.

Whilst the distance of the additional run is at your discretion, you should be aware that if you modify your event from a triathlon to a duathlon, your competitors may not have trained for two run sections and they may find this difficult.

Options to cope with this could be to hold a bike/run event, setting bikes off at regular intervals (necessary to ensure bunching of competitors is avoided) or to make the first run section shorter – ideal for lapped run courses.

This option normally allows the event to start on time, and does not require new sections of course to be created. This contingency option is also easily planned beforehand, with minimal work.

The main considerations when making this change revolve around informing the competitors as early as possible. This notification should include the reason for the change, the new course, the new start point, the start time and also detail any action the competitor needs to take if any. You should also prepare yourself for people not wanting to take part, and requesting a refund – it is a good idea to ensure your refund and withdrawal policy has provision in place to cover this possibility.

Change of Race Date

There are two main options for changing the date, either moving the event to an adjacent day (e.g. Saturday event moved to Sunday) or moving to a completely separate date. Moving to an adjacent day does mean that parts of the organisation can be maintained, but is often not acceptable to competitors.

By moving to a completely new date you give yourself the opportunity to continue planning for the event, where large parts are already organised. If this method is used you should inform all parties as soon as possible, especially where people are travelling significant distances to the event.

The major problem for Event Organisers is finding a suitable date to move to, as venues and host towns often have a number of events taking place throughout the year. You will need to work with local authorities to identify a suitable date, and once agreed, inform Triathlon Ireland to update your event listing, event management plan and risk assessment documentation.

Again, competitors may not be happy with the new date and ask for a refund; your refund and withdrawal policy should have provision in place to cover this possibility.

Cancellation of the Event

This is the option of last resort, but must be considered if circumstances are such that it would be irresponsible to continue with the event.

The impact of this decision can be managed with effective communication, including explanations of the situation. Again refunds to competitors will need to be considered – having a robust set of event terms and conditions can mitigate against any issues that may arise. You should try and outline plans for any future events and put a positive note in your communication.

Whilst this may be a very difficult decision to take, if all other appropriate actions have been considered to prevent cancellation, and there is no other option, putting the safety of competitors, event staff, volunteers and the public as a priority is paramount.

You may wish to consider event cancellation insurance to cover you for any loss resulting from the cancellation of your event.

There may be other situations that require you to modify the running of your event:

Traffic Congestion

Traffic accidents or congestion on major routes leading to your venue could cause not only your competitors to be delayed, but also contractors and volunteers. You should monitor traffic conditions and take appropriate action to ensure that your competitors are able to prepare for the event and that all your event staff and contractors are in attendance.

You could add a link on your website to a local traffic monitoring website, so that your competitors can monitor conditions themselves. If you know certain routes get congested, inform competitors beforehand.

Major Local Incidents

A major incident locally may require any police or medical staff you have at your event to attend the incident, thus leaving you without their support at your event. It is important that the communications you have with these authorities is good, so you are fully aware of any personnel leaving your event. These incidents could also take place on your course, again if your communication lines with the local authorities are good you should be made aware of this.