**Ref: 222/14**

**Date: 7 November 2014**

Memorandum

**To:** Diocesan Directors

Principals of Congregational Schools

**From**: Ian Baker, Director – Education Policy and Programs

**Subject: Lightning: Appropriate safe responses for risk management**

On 16 September 2014, students from Clancy Catholic College, West Hoxton, were effected by electrical storm activity but were not directly impacted by a lightning strike. The incident has raised questions about the appropriate response to thunder and lightning.

Currently in Australia, the so called “30/30 rule” is commonly applied. This rule suggests that if the time between the lightning flash and the thunder is less than 30 seconds, appropriate shelter ought to be sought and that people should stay sheltered until 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard. These procedures have been criticised as exposing people unnecessarily to risk.

In some countries, like the U.S.A., different more stringent risk avoidance procedures are promoted. Such procedures include:

1. Assigning staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during outdoor events.
2. Developing criteria for suspension and resumption of outdoor activities based on:
   1. When thunder is heard, or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, that is the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning, i.e. “When thunder roars, go indoors”.
   2. Suspend current outdoor activity and take shelter immediately.
   3. Thirty-minute rule: once the activity has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or flash of lightning is witnessed prior to resuming outdoor activity.
   4. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30 minute count, reset the clock and another 30 minute count should begin.
3. Periodically informing key staff of lightning risks and responses.

Lightning strikes are deadly. Storm activity is common in spring in eastern Australia. CECNSW suggests that schools review their current policies regarding lightning to mitigate the risk to life from lightning strikes. Particular care needs to be taken if students are attending at risk locations such as:

* Open areas with trees
* Water sources including beaches
* Golf courses and sporting fields and
* Elevated positions.

For further information on lightning risks, see <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/outdoorreslightning.aspx> . While this Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development document still includes the 30/30 rule, it does provide additional useful risk mitigation and avoidance advice.