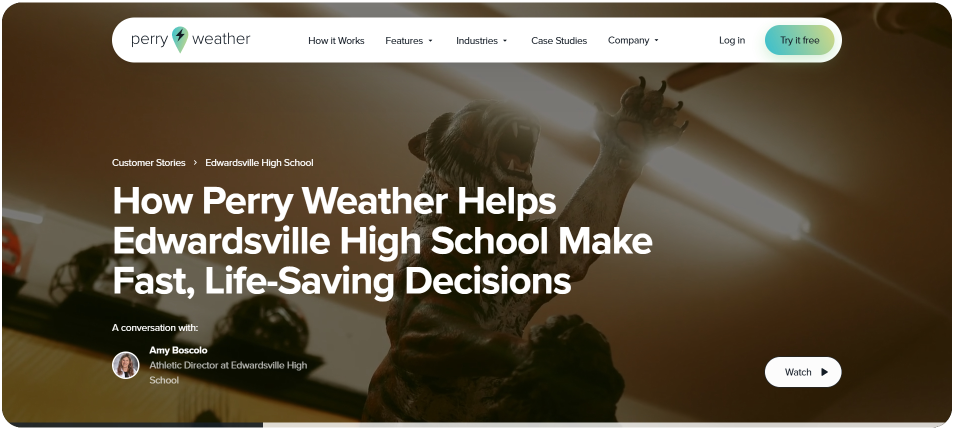

Customer Stories › Edwardsville High School

How Perry Weather Helps Edwardsville High School Make Fast, Life-Saving Decisions

A conversation with:

Amy Boscolo
Athletic Director at Edwardsville High School

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ABOUT

Situated 30 minutes outside of St. Louis, MO, Edwardsville High School is one of the largest schools south of Chicago. EHS athletic programs encompass 32 different sports and support 500 student athletes per season. Midwest storms are notoriously unpredictable and keep the athletics department on its toes regarding student athlete outdoor safety.

LOCATION

Edwardsville, Illinois

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> "Our mistakes are high profile. If we make a mistake, everybody knows because it is a community-wide event. We cannot make mistakes with safety, and we cannot make mistakes with weather. These are our students and their wellbeing is why we're here."

Amy Boscolo
Athletic Director

The Edwardsville High School (EHS) athletics department is no stranger to unpredictable weather. Situated 30 minutes outside of St. Louis, they receive their fair share of Midwestern thunderstorms and lightning that make planning outdoor sports and activities a challenge.

The EHS athletics program encompasses 32 different sports for 500 student athletes per season, and the weather is a major consideration for outdoor sports: They never know when a storm is going to pop up.

Weather in the area is so unpredictable that you'll hear people talk about the "Arch Effect," a piece of local lore hypothesizing that the Mississippi River pushes stormy weather around downtown St. Louis and into neighboring suburbs like Edwardsville. (BTW – the Perry Weather professional meteorology team has debunked this theory! This is a common misconception in many metro areas, but it just goes to show how unpredictable severe weather can really be.)

We sat down with Amy Boscolo, athletic director at EHS, to understand the full impact that weather has on her athletic programs, and how she is able to get a handle on weather disruptions.

An ongoing challenge: Keep kids safe despite unpredictable weather

There's no room for error in student safety.

For Boscolo, the objective is clear: "As an educator, the main thing we do is keep students safe. It doesn't matter if it's safety in the classroom or safety on the athletic fields."

Student athlete safety goes beyond musculoskeletal systems, rest and nutrition – facing the elements like rain, lightning and heat stress are big considerations, especially when you add parents, visiting teens and officials into the mix.

"Our mistakes are high profile. If we make a mistake, everybody knows because it is a community-wide event. We cannot make mistakes with safety, and we cannot make mistakes with weather. These are our students and their wellbeing is why we're here."

Additionally, Boscolo is clear-eyed about the unique challenges that face her as a female athletic director in a male-dominated field. The pressure to perform at a high level of excellence means failure is not an option.

With six years of athletic administration experience, in addition to several years as an athletic trainer, coach and teacher, Boscolo knows what she's doing. But she has to have access to the best tools, resources and information available to succeed in her role and pave the way for other women to do the same.

EDWARDSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
DISTRICT 7

Before using Perry Weather: Free weather apps just don’t cut it

Boscolo and her team take their jobs seriously.

They arrive at the school early every morning and already have weather on their minds: routinely checking facility conditions in case rain from the previous day renders the fields unusable. Then they evaluate the weather for the rest of the day in case activities and games need to be rescheduled.

But the free weather apps just can’t provide the information she needs to make decisions in the moment, when the stakes are high.

Free apps pull data from the closest airport and are only updated hourly, so the forecast might not be relevant to a specific school or be of any help when a last-minute decision is necessary.

To make matters worse, everyone on Boscolo’s team is using a different app, so she’d get conflicting reports and suggestions about whether or not she can run a practice or game.

“It’s amazing how many weather apps there really are. I myself had four on my phone.”

All this manual and mental work chasing weather updates from different sources takes Boscolo’s attention away from what matters most: the student athletes.

> “The weather in the afternoon is really what makes us most nervous. We want to make sure we can make game-day decisions before buses leave, and before officials head out to the facilities. We don’t want a group of students sitting out in a field if we know a storm is coming where they might be put in harm’s way.”

The EHS athletics department needed a source of truth for weather data, and a solution that could proactively notify them when bad weather is coming, and what to do – and when it’s safe to resume activities.

The solution: A single platform for weather data and lightning alerts

The EHS athletics department now uses Perry Weather, a weather technology platform that enables smarter, faster decisionmaking during severe weather.

The Perry Weather system monitors hyper-local and real-time weather data like lightning strikes for better game-day decisionmaking. It also automates alerts for Boscolo’s team and the general public about when a weather event requires attention, and when it’s safe to resume activity.

Because Perry Weather data is collected from on-site hardware, it’s pulling the most accurate and up-to-date information relevant to her facilities – not from an airport miles away like most free apps.

Sourcing weather data from a single platform and “source of truth” enables Boscolo to keep everyone looking at the same data.

Boscolo shares the Perry Weather features that help her run a successful athletic department.

Text, email and push notifications: Get everyone on the same page

At EHS, storms often come in from behind the stadium, so while fans can see ominous storms and horizontal lightning from the stands, it’s out of sight for the coaches, players and officials on the field. This often causes a sense of anxiety and panic among the spectators, even when storms are expected to pass or lightning is actually too far to impact the game.

Boscolo has her Perry Weather app policies set to alert her and her team via text, email and push notification when a weather event breaches the threshold for what she considers safe.

That way, she doesn't have to constantly check the weather during a game – she'll get the notification if action is required.

This proactive approach allows her to stop checking the weather constantly and focus on what's important.

Better game-day decisionmaking

Recently, Boscolo saw on the Perry Weather platform that storms were going to hit the area during a Varsity soccer game scheduled that day. The timing could not have been worse: it was two weeks before the end of the soccer season, and they had to get the contest in that day.

Armed with this weather information, they were able to make a game-day decision to switch the JV and Varsity game times to ensure that Varsity got to play before the storm came in.

Get a handle on game-day lightning detection

During the later JV game, the weather continued to progress: dark storm clouds, temps dropping, and strong winds. They knew a storm was getting closer, and anxiety started to build among players and fans: *Should they cut the game short? Is it safe to keep playing?*

But not Boscolo. Her lightning detection settings within the Perry Weather app are set to alert her when lightning reaches a 30-, 20- and 10-mile radius around her location.

She'll know exactly when it's time to evacuate the field.

> "We can see a storm coming in, but we can also see a storm coming out. There will be some times when we see lightning alerts about 25 miles away, but that storm has already passed us. Perry Weather gives us that peace of mind to know that our kids are safe, the game is safe, and we can continue to play. Or it gives us a warning that the storm is coming, it's getting closer, so be prepared to clear your stands and fields."

As the final horn blew and the girls were shaking hands, the first Perry Weather alert came in: *lightning is detected 28 miles away.*

Boscolo alerted the coaches and officials to exit the field quickly.

By the time everyone had exited the field, Boscolo received her second Perry Weather alert: *lightning is now detected 13 miles away.*

Lightning strikes are scary, but Boscolo had peace of mind to know that they didn't have to cut the game short, and then felt confident in her decision to rush players and officials off the field as soon as lighting *was* detected.

Lightning countdown timers give the all-clear

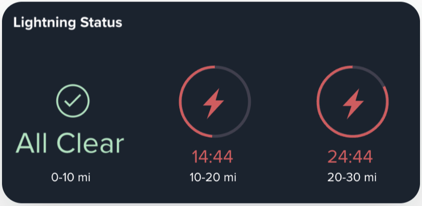
Not only can Boscolo see how far away the lightning strikes are, and how many there are, but she can also see a countdown timer after each strike.

Every time a lightning strike is detected, a 30-minute countdown timer will begin, and reset with every subsequent strike.

That way, Boscolo and her team know exactly when they can resume activities, or at least how long they can delay a decision.

And the best part: It works on the road! Coaches can update their location in the Perry Weather app and get lightning detection alerts and countdowns during away games as well.

Perry Weather provides Boscolo with lightning detection data specific to her facilities, not a general alert for the larger area.



Outdoor sirens and PA system alerts: Notify the general public

The EHS facilities are massive and often rented out for outside programs in the evenings and weekends, when Boscolo’s staff isn’t present to communicate weather updates and provide directives.

That’s where the outdoor sirens and PA systems come in.

The Perry Weather outdoor sirens are programmed to alert the public when lightning is detected within that 10-mile radius danger zone.

“We love having the sirens out on our campus. The sirens give us the peace of mind to know that when our campus is being rented, the people who are here are safe.”

Boscolo uses the text-to-speech feature to accompany the sirens with an automated message: *“Attention! Lightning has been detected in the area. Please seek shelter.”*

It tells people what is happening and what to do. And another message will play when it’s clear and safe.

Many Perry Weather customers find the text-to-speech PA messages to be one of the most fun features and get creative with their messages. A friend of Boscolo’s who also uses the platform said he blasts silly motivational messages to his tennis players for a good laugh. (Warning: They’re loud! Don’t use the PA system for anything you don’t want the neighbors to hear 😉)

Conclusion: How Perry Weather helps Edwardsville High School Keep Students Safe

The Perry Weather platform takes the burden of chasing weather updates off Boscolo’s plate so she can focus on what she does best: taking care of her student athletes and building a competitive athletic department.

She gets the most benefit from the lightning detection and countdown timers, the automated weather alerts and the outdoor sirens and audible alerting features. She can be both proactive and quickly reactive when unpredictable weather strikes.

Having access to Perry Weather works as a competitive advantage for her team, to the point that neighboring schools are also looking to switch over to the platform!

Final thoughts from Boscolo: “We try to make weather decisions early, but if a storm does pop up as we’re in the middle of a contest, Perry Weather just gives us that safety that as storms are moving in, we’re getting warnings that storms are coming, and we’re able to put our student athletes and families in a safe place if they do arise.”

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