



How the Tampa Bay Buccaneers tackle record-setting lightning risks

AdventHealth Training Center,
Tampa, Florida

The AdventHealth Training Center is the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' business, sports medicine, and training complex. It features a 95,000-square-foot air-conditioned indoor practice facility, three full-sized athletic turf practice fields — about eight acres total, player areas, and administrative offices located on roughly 22 acres.

During any given practice, around 100 to 125 players, coaches, trainers, and equipment staff are on the fields. In addition, the facility also hosts many other events, including those focused on the local community.

“We chose DTN based on recommendations from other teams and colleagues, and what DTN could deliver in terms of lightning data.”

Rob Julian, director of athletic fields and grounds, AdventHealth Training Center

“DTN has taken the pressure off me in making the determination to get off the fields when there is weather in the area. All the coaches, players, and staff have to do is look out to the beacon.”

Rob Julian, director of athletic fields and grounds, AdventHealth Training Center

What they were up against

Florida routinely tops the list of states with the most lightning strikes — 3,500 a day on average, according to Vaisala in its 10-year study. Hot and humid conditions, plus Gulf and Atlantic Coast breezes fuel frequent thunderstorms. The summer months pose the greatest risk, and that's when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are practicing for the next National Football League (NFL) season.

Safety is a critical focus of the Buccaneers organization, so its staff needed accurate, timely insights into near-term forecasts and evolving weather conditions. Staff used to maintain relationships with local on-air weather personalities; if they noticed the weather forecast might impact practice or an event, they could contact the local news station for more details and then pass information along to coaches, who would use it to make decisions. They would also watch cable weather networks, relying on the radar information they saw. Both situations required considerable time and effort, and the information was not always timely; more importantly, they lacked critical real-time lightning data. What's more, when lightning was within six miles of the area, they had to manually activate a remote siren to let the coaches, staff, and players know to seek shelter.

“It is a very stressful position to be in when you are in charge of the weather and are not a meteorologist, to make the calls, worrying about the worst-case scenario,” explained Rob Julian, director of athletic fields and grounds for AdventHealth Training Center, who joined the organization in 1993.

So, the team asked around the league to see what others were using at their facilities. Several suggested DTN, which the Tampa Bay Buccaneers chose based on peer recommendations and the company's offerings. That was over a decade ago, and they're still relying on DTN solutions and its world-class customer service.

What we did to help

The team uses two DTN solutions. The first, WeatherSentry®, is an industry-leading weather alerting and visualization system. Its user-friendly dashboard view offers easy access to critical location-based weather intelligence, including hourly forecasts for the next 72 hours and daily forecasts out to 15 days in the future. Detailed radar, storm tracking, and even vital Wet Bulb Globe Temperatures are available, plus patented, customizable alerts based on the staff's chosen high-impact parameters. This includes multiple ranges for monitoring dangerous lightning strikes as they approach.

The second solution is the company's maintenance-free OnGuard Siren Alerting System. It offers a fast, seamless way to initiate weather-driven evacuations through its audio and visual alerts, which are tied directly to the team's WeatherSentry settings. The solution features three multi-directional sirens and a dual-color omni-directional beacon with various mounting options, allowing for customization. The OnGuard Siren Alerting System eliminates

guesswork — and stress — for Julian and his team. It also reduces the risk of unnecessary delays or cancellations; practices and events are only stopped when conditions warrant, which increases trust in the staff and safety protocols. It's also important for events held after hours and on weekends when Julian and his team are not present.

What the impact was

The level of detail from the solutions — as well as the automated on-site alerts — provides Julian with peace of mind and allows him and his team to focus on their core tasks. That increases efficiencies.

The benefits aren't just limited to ensuring higher levels of safety with greater ease. WeatherSentry also helps improve turf care for their outdoor practice fields, grounds, and landscaping by delivering clearer insights into anticipated and actual rainfall, helping them to fine tune irrigation and spraying treatment decisions — saving water, time, and money.

