

Environmental Health and Safety Guidance Document Remote Fieldwork Safety

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to ensure that University of Idaho's faculty, staff, and students are prepared to safely conduct remote fieldwork. This document outlines the risks associated with remote fieldwork and some of the best practices for mitigating those risks.

Each department is encouraged to create their own "Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan" that works best for each individual situation. Due to the variety of situations, there is no "one size fits all" approach and some recommendations may not be feasible to implement; suitable equivalent practices should be developed for such recommendations.

Background

Fieldwork is fundamental to the university's mission. However, remote fieldwork has the potential to expose employees to additional hazards that are uncommon to their daily practices. Remote fieldwork is not exclusive to a particular discipline and may be viewed as commonplace in agriculture, engineering, fisheries and wildlife, forestry, and geology, among others. While extremely remote sites, such as Antarctica, certainly command an elevated level of respect and attention to detail, it is "routine" fieldwork that most often leads to injury, illness, or other unintended consequences

OSHA's General Duty Clause requires that employees are provided "*a place of employment ... free from recognized hazards ... likely to cause death or serious physical harm ... about which the employer knew or should have known.*"

It is only with proper preparation that remote fieldwork risks can be recognized, evaluated, and effectively managed.

This requirement is not applicable for travel that includes risks which are no greater than the participant(s) would normally experience in their day-to-day life, such as traveling to other established academic institutions, attending conferences, or conducting errands.

Definitions

Definitive Treatment

The most appropriate treatment for a patient, as determined by a medical professional, after all other options have been considered (e.g. surgery for internal bleeding, a cast for a broken bone, stitches for a deep laceration).

Employee

Any U of I administrator, faculty, staff, post-doctoral fellow, student, volunteer, or other university affiliate.



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Fieldwork

Academic, research, and related support functions conducted at a location not typical of office, campus, or other urban environments.

Fieldwork Policy

College- or department-level planned oversight of its operational units' remote fieldwork operations.

Hazard

Anything with the potential to cause harm in terms of human injury or illness, damage to property, and/or damage to the environment such as materials and equipment in use, processes employed, and/or environmental working conditions including, but not limited to: ground or soil conditions; stream, lake or ocean conditions; weather or climate conditions; flora and fauna; and/or human activity.

Operational Unit

A natural group of employees, as determined by the scope of the fieldwork performed, that generally reports to a single supervisor (e.g. primary investigator, shop or service manager, etc.).

Remote

In terms of both distance and accessibility, a location that is more than approximately half an hour's travel time away from receiving definitive treatment.

Risk Assessment

A systematic process of identifying and evaluating the likelihood that an undesired event will occur due to the realization of a hazard.

Working Alone

Any instance whereby an employee conducting remote fieldwork is unable to maintain visual or voice contact with another person.

Guidance

All University of Idaho units (colleges or departments) participating in remote fieldwork shall develop and implement a Remote Fieldwork Safety Policy. Additionally, operational units (fieldwork teams) will have a Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan developed by the supervisor and in alignment with their colleges or department's Remote Fieldwork Safety Policy.

Remote Fieldwork that is conducted annually at an established site shall have a Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan that is reviewed and updated annually.

A Remote Fieldwork Policy shall include, at a minimum:

- Conditions under which working alone are prohibited.



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- An internal review and endorsement procedure that demonstrates it (the College or Department) is satisfied that the supervisor's Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan is appropriate and that the action plan items have been, are being, or will be implemented.
- An accountability procedure that verifies its employees' departure from (check-out), and return to (check-in), their day-to-day place of work (e.g. U of I Main Campus, Ag Research Field, etc.).
 - The accountability procedure shall be managed by at least one person (a Monitor) who reports to the same day-to-day place of work as the remote field workers.
 - The Monitor must be readily available and prepared to receive the check-in. The Monitor must document:
 - a) The check-in as intended, or
 - b) A confirmed rescheduling of the check-in (e.g. a delay due to weather, travel plans, etc.), or
 - c) Initiation of the operational unit's Emergency Response Plan if the check-in does not occur.

A Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan shall include, at a minimum:

- A risk assessment of sufficient scope.
- An action plan describing how risks will be managed.
- A 'check-in / check-out' procedure to ensure that fieldworkers are accounted for while at the remote site.
- An emergency response plan of sufficient scope.
- Identification of risk-appropriate training.

Responsibilities

Environmental Health and Safety:

Provide consulting, plan templates, programs and services according to university policies in APM chapter 35.

College or Department:

Establish and implement a Fieldwork Policy for the college or department.

Supervisor:

- Follow all procedures, guidelines, provisions, and responsibilities described in their college or department's fieldwork policies.
- Follow currently recognized best practices by seeking expert advice from inside and outside the university as necessary.
- Manage the development and implementation of their operational unit's "Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan."

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- Review their “Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan” with EHS staff and follow up for necessary updates.
- Provide and document employee training.
- Ensure that all members within the plan or affected by the safety plan are aware of the plan and emergency procedures outlined within the plan.

Employee:

- Conduct all fieldwork in accordance with their operational unit’s Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan and College or Department’s Fieldwork Policies.
- In a timely manner, inform their supervisor of any changes to existing or newly discovered risks that might undermine the hazard control measures described in the Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan.
- Take adequate precautions to always protect the safety of themselves and all individuals involved.
- Understand how to respond to potential emergencies as outlined in the Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan

