

Guidelines on Safety in Field Research

Responsible Unit: Office of Environmental Health and Safety

Date: Tuesday, March 01, 2011

These administrative guidelines and procedures accompany the *Framework on Off-Campus Safety* (hereinafter referred to as the *Framework*) and apply to all in-country and out-of-country field research activities including, but not limited to, field research conducted by faculty, post-doctoral fellows, graduate and undergraduate students, staff and authorized volunteers. These guidelines are specific to field research. However, all guidelines that accompany the *Framework on Off-Campus Safety* can be used concurrently. Select the most appropriate guideline(s) for each situation, if questions arise, please contact the Office of the Vice-President and Provost.

Implications

It is part of the mission of the University as an institution of scholarship and research that many of its members - faculty, staff and students - engage in field research beyond the boundaries of its campuses. It is the policy of the University to encourage such activities as may be appropriate to its academic mission while at the same time making reasonable and appropriate efforts to assess and address health and safety concerns associated with these activities.

All participants in field research bear some degree of responsibility for their health and safety. The primary responsibility, however, lies with academic supervisors in charge of field research projects and team leaders who are involved in directly supervising research on location. Due diligence must be exercised by all concerned parties in assessing the nature of, and the means for dealing with, the categories of risk that may be associated with each location and kind of field research and in determining whether the activity is appropriate to proceed making risks known and obtaining informed consent.

Application and Scope

Field research consists of work activities conducted for the purpose of study, research or teaching which are undertaken by faculty, staff or students of the University at a location outside the geographical boundaries of the University campuses.

Field research activities, such as those involving isolated or remote or politically unstable locations; extreme weather conditions; hazardous terrain; harmful wildlife; or lack of ready access to emergency services, can expose participants to significant risks to their health, safety or well-being, at locations outside the direct supervisory control of the University.

Guidelines on Safety in Field Research

Please note that some field research activities may not impose risks beyond those already experienced in daily life, and as such, may be deemed a low risk activity. For example, the collection of samples may occur in the vicinity of a campus or in settings already encountered on a day-to-day basis. In such circumstances, Academic Supervisors (defined below) may exercise appropriate discretion with respect to the application of these guidelines.

The intent of these guidelines is to ensure that prior to undertaking field research:

1. all concerned parties are aware of their responsibilities for field research;
2. a risk assessment is carried out to identify potential hazards associated with the field research and to establish appropriate controls to eliminate or minimize such hazards; and
3. all participants have an informed understanding of the associated risks and provide their consent to assuming the risks of participation in the project.

Under normal circumstances, these guidelines are not intended for organized off-campus activities such as:

1. Supervised study or work placements at external institutions which are affiliated with the University or which the University department has designated to be an approved placement centre; or
2. Travel for conferences, seminars, meetings or visits to other institutions.

However, should unusual conditions exist, such as epidemics or natural disasters or war, terrorism and unusual political instability, academic supervisors must ensure that these guidelines are implemented. Academic supervisors are responsible for conducting risk assessments prior to all organized off-campus activities. For out-of-country travel, travel advisory reports relating to safety, security and health must be consulted (see Appendices).

For all off-campus activities conducted on the premises of or under the control of another organization or institution, academic supervisors must ensure that the local safety procedures of that organization or institution are appropriate to the type of activities being conducted, are in compliance with local laws and regulations, and are consistent with the safety standards and practices at the University of Toronto.

Sections A to G (of the Framework) provide general information regarding insurance and benefits coverage, travel immunization, and travel advisories, and are intended to assist with field research planning and preparation. These appendices are to be consulted in all cases of field research.

Responsibilities

This section outlines the responsibilities for safety in field research.

1 Department Head (Dean or Designate)

The Department Head (Dean or Designate) is responsible for:

- a) ensuring that academic supervisors are aware of the guidelines for safety in field research;
- b) ensuring compliance with these guidelines within the department or faculty; and
- c) designating a departmental/faculty contact person for all field research teams.

2 Academic Supervisor

The primary responsibility for compliance with these guidelines lies with the Academic Supervisor. Normally, academic supervisors should be members of the University faculty with continuing appointments; any exceptions to this practice must be approved by the Department Head. It is recommended that Academic Supervisors complete the Office of Environmental Health and Safety online due diligence course prior to taking on this role. An Academic Supervisor is responsible for the following:

- a) approving the composition of the field team including any dependents of team members, unless a dependent of the academic supervisor is to be included in the team, in which case the composition of the team shall be approved by the departmental chair or other academic administrator to whom the supervisor reports;
- b) establishing a clear chain of responsible team leadership that is understood by all participants;
- c) in consultation with the team members, identifying and assessing the nature of the specific health and safety risks associated with the field project; and establishing controls that are appropriate to the nature of the activities, comply with local legislative requirements, and are consistent with University of Toronto policies, programs and standards;
- d) ensuring that appropriate controls are implemented, including the provision of appropriate protective equipment, procedures, and training to deal with the risks as far as is reasonably practicable;

- e) ensuring that each member of the field research team is aware of these guidelines, the Requirements for Reasonable Care outlined in Section 7, the risks of the particular project, and the established procedures for dealing with these risks;
- f) obtaining appropriate written informed consent from each member of the field research team; and
- g) maintaining written documentation of the above; to include the completion of the “Field Research Safety Planning Record” and its placement on record with the Department Head prior to departure on field research.

3 Team Leader

The Team Leader may be the Academic Supervisor or may, in the absence of the Academic Supervisor, be another member of the team who has been designated as such by the Academic Supervisor. Normally, Team Leaders would be continuously appointed members of the University faculty; exceptions to this practice should be approved by the Department Head. In some situations, it may be practical to have more than one Team Leader. The Team Leader is responsible for:

- a) ensuring implementation of the controls established by the Academic Supervisor, including the use of appropriate safety equipment, safety procedures and medical precautions by team members during field research;
- b) conducting ongoing risk assessments during field research and reporting any new hazards to the Academic Supervisor;
- c) dealing with and resolving any safety concerns which arise in the field;
- d) maintaining regular contact with the Academic Supervisor and/or departmental contact; and
- e) informing the Academic Supervisor and/or departmental contact of all accidents, illnesses or emergencies which occur in the field.

4 Team Members

Each member of the field research team is responsible for:

- a) acknowledging the risks of the particular field project;

- b) using the appropriate protective equipment provided and following the procedures established by the Academic Supervisor;
- c) working safely and in a manner to prevent harm to himself/herself or to others;
- d) understanding the Requirements for Reasonable Care outlined in Section 7;
- e) providing evidence of a satisfactory state of health and immunization;
- f) providing written consent of the above to the Academic Supervisor or Department Head;
- g) reporting any identified hazards to the Team Leader or Academic Supervisor; and
- h) reporting all accidents, illnesses or emergencies to the Team Leader or Academic Supervisor.

5 Solitary Field Research

Under some circumstances solitary field research activities are to be strongly discouraged, particularly those involving remote or hazardous locations, high-risk activities or other unusual conditions.

In situations where solitary work is deemed necessary and unavoidable, a stringent code of practice must be established to address worker competency, procedures for regular reporting, emergency procedures, and other precautions and procedures appropriate to the types of activities involved. In such situations, the Solitary Field Researcher will assume the responsibilities of Team Leader (Section 3) and Team Member (Section 4).

6 Refusal to Participate in Unsafe Activities/Work

All participants have a responsibility to exercise judgment and common sense in respect to their own safety, taking into account their own capabilities and circumstances at the time. Any participant who is concerned with the safety preparations that have been made or concerning the safety of any activity has an obligation to bring this concern to the attention of the on-site leader, Program Supervisor, Department/ Unit Head, or any other University Official (e.g., Safety Abroad Office, Dean, Director of Environmental Health and Safety) as soon as possible after the concern arises. Coupled with this responsibility is the right to refuse to participate in unsafe activity.

Employees

Every employee of the University of Toronto has the right and obligation to refuse, at any time, to participate in any work activity that he/she feels may endanger his/her health or safety or that of another person.

Students

Every student has the right to refuse to participate in any activity that they deem unsafe. Students should communicate this decision to their Team Leader (on-site supervisor). The student's concern should be taken seriously, offering the student either an alternative or excusing the student from this particular activity. If the student does not feel satisfied, they should contact the Academic Supervisor and abide by that Supervisor's decisions. Should the student not be satisfied with accommodations made, they may appeal the decision through the normal academic appeals process.

Any individual member of a field research team has a duty to refuse at any time to participate in any activity which he/she feels may endanger his/her health or safety or that of another person. In these situations please contact the Office of Environmental Health and Safety at ehs.office@utoronto.ca or 416-978-6641 for guidance.

7 Requirements for Reasonable Care

Areas in which those involved in field research must exercise reasonable care to secure safety include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- a) assurance of a satisfactory state of fitness, health, and immunization of the participants for purposes of travel to and participation in field research at the particular location (refer to Section G for travel health and immunization guidelines; note that many immunizations and/or medical treatments must be given well in advance of leaving the country in order to take effect; advance planning for this is essential);
- b) availability of appropriate first-aid supplies and expertise; and accessibility to emergency medical treatment (in some circumstances first aid certification may also be advisable);
- c) availability of appropriate personal clothing, personal equipment and field equipment to support the research;
- d) availability of appropriate food and accommodation on site, and during travel to and from the site;

Guidelines on Safety in Field Research

- e) arrangements for appropriate periods of rest, especially in situations of extreme heat or unfamiliar circumstances to avoid illness;
- f) arrangements for appropriate transportation to, at and returning from the location of the field research;
- g) provision of information prior to departure about insurance needs, availability and limitations (see Appendices A to E);
- h) provision of information about requirements of foreign governments and other jurisdictions concerning travel to and research at the site (see SectionSection G);
- i) arrangements for continuous responsible leadership of all field research teams;
- j) definition prior to departure, and on a continuing basis on the site, of the tasks and responsibilities assigned to each participant;
- k) knowledge of all health and safety legislation and requirements applicable to the jurisdiction in which the field research is being conducted (all team members **must** comply with applicable local legislation). All research participants must view the training for researchers which can be found at www.ehs.utoronto.ca. If researchers require further information about local requirement, please contact ehs.office@utoronto.ca;
- l) provision of appropriate information and training regarding the risks associated with field research activities, materials, equipment and environment, and the appropriate control measures for dealing with them;
- m) provision of appropriate information and training for responding to and reporting of accidents involving injuries, damage to property and equipment, and spills, leaks or release of hazardous materials. Please complete the online incident reporting form which can be found on the EHS website at www.ehs.utoronto.ca.
- n) recognition of the right and responsibility of an individual to exercise personal judgement in acting to avoid harm in situations of apparent danger; in this regard, students should be informed of the general To assist in this process, please complete the online Preliminary Risk Assessment that can be found at www.ehs.utoronto.ca.