

Field Safety Policy

Preamble:

Students and Faculty take part in two, distinctly different types of fieldwork.

1. Tightly-structured and planned, >official= graduate and undergraduate field courses (e.g., 2250y, 3350y, 4450y, 4451y, 4458y), plus various more informal weekend and other trips. For these, Departmental approval prior to departure is required.

2. Research fieldwork, usually involves a much smaller number of people, and commonly involves a much less tightly-constrained schedule. Fieldwork may take place in areas where potential hazards are much greater. Although research leaders take practical responsibility for these activities, the Chair is nevertheless required to approve the safety preparations made for research fieldwork, prior to its commencement.

It is therefore appropriate to lay out safety plans for each of these types of field activity that are tailored specifically to that activity.

UNDERGRADUATE and GRADUATE FIELD TRIPS

Responsibilities of Trip Leaders:

1. Each trip leader (who is in effect, the Field Safety Officer for that particular trip), will develop a safety plan that is specific to each field trip. This plan will include the following elements:

- a) A list of all the locations to be visited on the trip, with the date when each site will be visited.
- b) Location, phone number, and means of access to the hospital nearest to each field site. If road transportation is not available, another method of transport must be

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identified.

- c) A list of potential hazards specific to the field trip. **This list of potential hazards and appropriate safety measures must be included in the Field Trip Itinerary that must be delivered to each participant, and to the department Chair (either hard copy or by email), one week before departure.**
- d) As a part of the safety briefing, the trip leader will make it clear that any member of the field trip group who is unable to participate fully in class activities, due to the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, or use of other drugs, may be refused permission to participate in that day=s activities. Similarly, anyone who causes damage to property (e.g. vehicles, hotel) as a result of intoxication will be held fully responsible for the cost of repairing such damage. **They will also be reported to the Department Chair who may impose additional disciplinary measures.**
- e) At, or prior to, the first stop on the trip, the leader will give an oral Safety Briefing, and will require each participant to sign a sheet (pages 4-5 of the Field Trip Itinerary) confirming that they have received the safety briefing. These pages will be re-submitted to the office if completed off campus after trip completion. By their signature, participants also acknowledge that they may be denied the right to participate on days when their capacity is deemed to be reduced due to consumption of alcohol or other drugs.
- f) Before departure, the leader will check that safety equipment (e.g. hard hats, safety goggles) issued to participants, is in a serviceable condition.
- g) The leader will ensure that all participants have signed an Acknowledgment and Assumption of Risk form (A&AoR) **prior to departure**. This form will also contain details of a contact person in case of emergency, health insurance, and also medical information that could be important to a doctor administering emergency treatment (e.g. drug sensitivities, allergies, regular medication).
- h) In the event of an accident, the leader must complete an Accident/Incident Report Form. Copies of this form must be submitted to the Department of Occupational

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Health and Safety, the Department Chair/ Health & Safety Administrator, and the injured person.

- i) All trip leaders must have First Aid certification.
- j) Copies of signed A&AoR forms in g) shall be provided to the Department's Health and Safety Administrative Officer **prior to departure**. Failure to provide these documents may result in a cancellation of the field trip.

Responsibilities of Teaching Assistants

Teaching Assistants have a position of considerable responsibility, commonly being expected to drive vehicles, assist with instruction, and act as exemplarity role models for undergraduates. All teaching assistants are expected to comply with the conditions outlined under 'Responsibilities of Students' (below). TA's are expected to set a good example to undergraduates, including showing responsible attitude to alcohol, showing consideration for others, and fostering a positive work ethic.

Responsibilities of Students

Although trip leaders take every reasonable safety precaution, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to behave in a responsible manner in order to ensure the safety of themselves and other participants. Complacency, inattention, lack of preparation and / or training will all increase the risk of accidents. Specific responsibilities include:

- a) Pay attention to, and act upon, the advice given in the pre-trip Safety Briefing that must be included in the Trip Itinerary.
- b) Use all recommended safety equipment, and comply with safety instructions given by the trip leader
- c) Any student who is unable to participate fully in class activities due to the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, or use of other drugs, may be refused permission to

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participate in that day=s activities. They will also be reported to the Department Chair who may impose additional disciplinary measures.

- d) Anyone who causes damage to property (e.g. vehicles, hotel, campground), or who exhibits inconsiderate behavior (e.g. excessive noise), as a result of intoxication, will be held fully responsible for the cost of repairing damage, or payment of fines imposed by authorities.
- e) Sign an Acknowledgment and Assumption of Risk Form **prior to departure**. On this form, you should inform the trip leader (in confidence) of any critical medical condition (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, severe allergy), or medication (e.g. Insulin, EpiPen adrenalin injector, etc) that may affect your health during the trip, or be essential information to an attending doctor in case of emergency.
- f) Obtain necessary supplementary health insurance if traveling outside Canada.
- g) Failure to adhere to any of these responsibilities may result in your removal from the trip and loss of course credit.

RESEARCH FIELDWORK

Research fieldwork may take place in remote areas where a variety of natural hazards may be encountered, and where the availability of, and access to, hospital facilities may be very limited. It is the responsibility of research supervisors (i.e. the professor running the research program and supervising the student(s), to be aware of the principal hazards likely to be encountered in the field research area, preferably as a result of first-hand experience. If the leader does not have such experience, it is recommended that the supervisor consider hiring a local guide.

The biggest factor in your personal safety is **common sense**. Research field work may be in rough, broken terrain, commonly with slippery or loose rocks underfoot, and thick bush, deadfall trees, thorns, etc. to negotiate. Safe travel over this sort of terrain requires constant attention to what is underfoot, in front and above. A moment of inattention can lead to a nasty slip, a sprained ankle, cuts, grazes, or worse. Look where you are putting your feet at all times. If you are not comfortable on a steep slope, don't go any higher - find another way around. If you are frightened, you are even more of a hazard to yourself and your partner. In general, experience will lead to more confidence, and less likelihood of accidents. However, beware of over-confidence!

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General Precautions

A number of general precautions and procedures can be specified for any field research:

- a) Never work alone. Your field partner is your best insurance policy.
- b) Know where you are. Have a detailed topographic map with you, and know how to use it. A GPS unit is a nice accessory, but they do not always work, especially in deep ravines or dense forest.
- c) Have a means of communication. A cell phone may work in relatively civilized areas, but away from main road corridors and towns, cell phones may not work. A satellite phone might be the best means of emergency communication (be aware that the Global Star system does not work north or south of about 70 degrees latitude). Make sure that everyone in the party knows how to use the satellite phone. A satellite phone may not work in a deep ravine, or in thick forest.
- d) At all times, try to ensure that someone knows where you are working. It may be possible to leave a detailed day-by-day itinerary with a responsible person at home (could be spouse or partner; Department safety officer). However, fieldwork schedules commonly change depending on weather or other conditions, so a definitive schedule may be impractical. It is usually possible to notify someone of your movements on timescales of a few days (e.g. helicopter pilots will know where you were dropped off; campground attendant, or even via a phone call to a spouse or partner can provide a starting point in case a search is needed).
- e) As a member of the Union of Graduate Students, you have the right to refuse to work under what you consider to be unsafe conditions.

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Specific Precautions

Each field area will have its own suite of specific hazards, and it is the responsibility of the research supervisor to compile a Safety Briefing document for each participant in the field program. The supervisor and all participants in the field program will meet prior to commencement of field work to review safety procedures specific to the field area. All participants will sign a sheet to acknowledge receipt of the safety notes, and attendance at the safety briefing. Included in the Safety Briefing must be a list of the locations and phone numbers of the nearest medical facilities, as well as phone numbers for local air transportation companies (helicopter and/or fixed wing, as appropriate). Relevant vaccinations must also be up to date, particularly when working outside Canada. A first aid kit must be carried by each field party.

The range of potential hazards that may be encountered in the field is large, and could include:

Local diseases (especially in the tropics).

Severe weather hazards, (including possibility of heatstroke, hypothermia, lightning strike, etc.), risk of attack by wild animals (e.g. bears, snakes).

Legal risks (e.g. photographing restricted installations such as airports, military bases, power plants, etc. in certain countries),

Crime risks, such as theft, kidnapping, car hijacking, etc.; civil insurrection.

Health risks, such as unavailability of necessary prescription medications in certain countries.

Poor communications (bad roads, scarce fuel, no telephone service, etc.).

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Environmental issues may be relevant. Consideration of the following topics may be necessary: minimize air pollution and noise nuisance from machinery; minimize disturbance to wildlife, plants and aquatic life; minimize potential erosion due to excavation or cutting of vegetation; protect archaeological sites; minimize water pollution arising from camp waste, petroleum products, sewage, etc.

Equity Issues. The Department of Equity Services provides the following comments for the guidance of both students and faculty.

1) Students are encouraged to review the Code of Student Conduct before participating in field trips. The Code defines the general standard of conduct expected of students and provides examples of sanctions that may be imposed under the Code. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/board/code.pdf>

2) All participants (trip leaders, teaching assistants and students) are reminded that Western's policy on Non-Discrimination and Harassment apply to all members of the University community in their interactions with other members of the University community while on department-related field trips. For more information, please visit the website of Western's Equity & Human Rights Services: www.uwo.ca/equity

3) Students who may require accommodation (e.g. religious or disability-related) are encouraged to contact the leader of the field trip to discuss accommodation options. For more information on the duty to accommodate, please see the website of Western's Equity & Human Rights Services: <http://www.uwo.ca/equity/accommodation/faq.htm>