

EH&S Remote Fieldwork Safety Guide

Purpose

To ensure that employees are prepared to safely conduct remote fieldwork, are accounted for, and have reasonable access to assistance in the event of an emergency.

Background

Fieldwork is fundamental to the University's mission. By its very nature, fieldwork has the potential to expose employees to hazards that are uncommon to their day-to-day lives. Fieldwork is not exclusive to any particular discipline and may be viewed as commonplace in agriculture, engineering, fisheries and wildlife, forestry, and geology, among others. And 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.

Definitions:

Employee

Any full or part-time OSU administrator, faculty, staff, post-doctoral fellow, student, or volunteer.

Fieldwork

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

Remote

In terms of both distance and accessibility, any location more than approximately one hour's travel time from receiving definitive treatment.

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).

Operational Unit

A natural grouping 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).

Fieldwork Program

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

Risk Assessment

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

Environmental Health & Safety

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.

Working Alone

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

Guidance:

All Oregon State University operational units participating in remote fieldwork shall develop and implement a Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan prior to commencement of the operations described therein. However, there is no intention that written risk assessments will be undertaken for travel, the risks of 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. The [OSU Fieldwork Safety Planning Guide](#) is available online.

Responsibilities:

Risk Management / Environmental Health & Safety

Provide consulting, resources, programs, and services as described in the [OSU Safety \(SAF\) Manual](#).

Supervisor

- Follow all procedures, guidelines, provisions, and/or responsibilities described in your College or Department’s Fieldwork Program.
- Follow currently recognized best practices by seeking expert advice from inside and outside the University as necessary.
- Manage the development and implementation of your operational unit’s Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan. At a minimum, the plan shall include:
 - 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.
- Provide and document employee training:
 - The College or Department’s Fieldwork Program
 - Your Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan prior to commencement of, and any changes made during, the operations described therein.
 - Safety training identified as risk-appropriate in the Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan.
- Provide your emergency response plan to the College or Departmental check-in Monitor.

College or Department

Establish and implement a Fieldwork Program that shall, at a minimum, include:

- Conditions under which working alone is prohibited.

Environmental Health & Safety

- 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. OSU Main Campus, Ag Research Station, 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 fieldworkers.
 - The Monitor must be readily available and prepared to receive the check-in. The Monitor must document:
 - The check-in as intended, or
 - A confirmed rescheduling of the check-in (e.g. a delay due to weather, travel plans, etc.), or
 - Initiation of the operational unit's Emergency Response Plan if the check-in does not occur.

Employee

- Conduct all fieldwork in accordance with your operational unit's Remote Fieldwork Safety Plan and College or Department's Fieldwork Program.
- *In a timely manner*, inform your 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 protect your own safety at all times.

Resources

Refer to the EH&S [Fieldwork](#) webpage for related planning, risk assessment, and training resources.