



Field Research Safety Information

1.0 Introduction

All research, whether conducted in a laboratory or in an outdoor field setting, requires safety training. Individuals are responsible for their own safety, as well as for performing research in a manner that does not endanger the safety of those around them. The Ohio State University Office of Environmental Health and Safety provides safety information and training to faculty, staff, and students. More detailed information about field research safety is available in the *Safety Guidelines for Field Researchers*, which is accessible at www.ehs.osu.edu.

Field research is defined as work activities conducted for the purpose of research by employees or students of the university outside of a research laboratory. Field research hazards may be presented by research activities, as well from the physical, political, social, cultural and/or economic environment of the field location. While some events may be unpredictable and may be unavoidable, the risks associated with field research can be greatly reduced through training, awareness of hazards and exercising good judgment.

Definitions for these guidelines:

- Principal Investigator (PI) is a faculty member who assembles a team to carry out field research.
- A field supervisor is a person appointed by the Principal Investigator to directly oversee field research at the field location.
- A field worker is a person who carries out research under the direction of a field supervisor.

Solitary field research activities in remote areas are strongly discouraged. Whenever possible, fieldwork should be performed in teams of at least two people after assessing the field research risks and available controls and establishing safety procedures.

Each field researcher has the right to refuse to participate in an activity that they feel may endanger their own safety or the safety of another person.

2.0 Safety Issues for Field Workers

The primary responsibilities of a field worker are to show up for the project prepared, trained, and mindful of safety issues while performing research in the field.

2.1 Preparation

Awareness is the most basic and most important step in preparing to work in the field. To adequately prepare for field research, the worker needs to understand what the specific field research project entails and what safety concerns may arise. Field workers should be aware of the locations of emergency equipment, as well as basic emergency procedures. This is analogous to “site-specific” training in laboratories. CPR and Wilderness First Aid training is highly recommended.

All field research workers should be informed of the potential physical and environmental hazards in the area such as poisonous plants, animals, insects, terrain, biological hazards, weather conditions, crime, and disease. The PI and/or field supervisor shall maintain completed medical history forms for each field researcher consisting of emergency contact information, including special medical conditions, allergies and medications that need to be taken during the field research.

2.2 Conducting Field Research

Field workers must use the appropriate protective equipment and follow the specified procedures provided to them by the field supervisor.

3.0 Safety Issues for Field Supervisors

The field supervisor has the same responsibilities as a field worker. In addition, the field supervisor is responsible for safety planning prior to the field work, as well as implementation of safety protocols while in the field. Field

supervisors must exercise good judgment, assess risks, and take all steps required to ensure personal health and safety of participating members.

3.1 Preparation

A field supervisor is expected to have a safety plan and all of the suitable training for conducting field research. Field supervisors should have the following training: general safety orientation, CPR, wilderness first aid, and how to use emergency equipment. The following factors should be considered when developing the safety plan.

- **Scheduling:** To the extent possible, field research should be planned in advance. The PI should know when and where field research is conducted. If the PI is away, then department staff should be advised of pending research.
- **Protective Equipment:** A properly equipped first aid kit, a cell phone/satellite phone, and extra water are required on field excursions. Appropriate personal protective clothing and equipment are required
- **Weather:** The typical weather for the season of the field research should be assessed and reported to the field workers.
- **Contacts:** The home phone number of all field workers and supervisors, as well as phone numbers of emergency contacts, should be included in the safety plan maintained by the supervisor. The home and work numbers of the PI needs to be kept in the plan in case field researchers need to contact PI during an emergency.
- **Medical facilities:** The telephone number, location and directions to a medical facility in the vicinity of the field site should be written into the safety plan maintained by the field supervisor.
- **Vehicles:** All state and local laws, rules and regulations must be followed.

3.2 Conducting Field Research

The field supervisor must ensure the research and safety procedures established by the PI are implemented by ensuring that the team members use the appropriate safety procedures, as well as conduct ongoing risk assessments and report any unanticipated hazards to the PI.

4.0 Safety Issues for Principal Investigators

When in the field, the PI has the same responsibilities as a field worker and may take on the responsibility of being field supervisor, or may designate that responsibility to the field supervisor in charge. When not in the field, the PI should make an effort to ensure that field work is performed in compliance with the safety plan, that all personnel are provided the necessary safety training and equipment.

The PI is responsible for:

- Facilitating the field supervisor with determining the specific health and safety risks and level of risk associated with the particular field project.
- Assembling a field team and establishing a clear chain of command, which is understood by all team participants
- Participate in pre-trip planning specific to the trip, including a review of the safety plan.
- Documenting that each field worker is aware of the provisions of the safety plan, the risks associated with the project, training, and verifying that all safety procedures are in place.
- Ensuring that appropriate controls and safety procedures are in place to deal with the risks reasonably expected to be associated with the field research, as well as provision of appropriate protective equipment and training.
- Ensuring research has been reviewed and approved as required by the following institutional research risk committees:
 - Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee review of animal research: more information is available at <http://orrrp.osu.edu/iacuc/about/>
 - Institutional Biosafety Committee review of research involving biohazards: more information is available at <http://orrrp.osu.edu/ibc/about/>
 - Institutional Review Board (IRB) review of research involving human subjects: more information is available at <http://orrrp.osu.edu/irb/about/>

When the PI will accompany OSU students to international locations for the purpose of research, the PI is required to comply with the following Office of International Affairs (OIA) risk management policies:

- Inform the OIA of plans to lead OSU students to an international location. Please complete the Faculty International Travel form and return to OIA at least one quarter prior to travel.
- Participate in OIA orientation for faculty who are serving as study abroad resident directors and/or leading students overseas for research. OIA Resident Director Orientations are offered on a quarterly basis. Emergency procedures, health, safety and security are essential risk management topics addressed at the orientations. If you are unable to attend an orientation, you must schedule an individual appointment with the director of study abroad or other designated OIA staff member.
- Provide list of participating students and their contact information to OIA at least one quarter in advance of travel. OIA will contact the students to advise them of supplemental study abroad health insurance, health form, U.S. Embassy registration and other pre-departure resources related to health and safety.

More information regarding international travel is available from the OSU OIA.