

Outdoor Fieldwork Safety Policy

Section 1 - Definitions

(1) For the purpose of this policy:

- a. Fieldwork: any work, study or research authorised by the University and undertaken by employees, students, contractors, visitors or other approved participants at a location off campus and outside of urban areas.
- b. Foot traverse research and work - is fieldwork undertaken which requires walking across country more than 0.5 kilometres.
- c. Fieldwork Leader - person directly in charge of the fieldwork.
- d. Hazard Recognition - is the prior identification of hazards associated with an activity. Potential hazards are identified on the basis of previous experience or by anticipating potential hazards that could be associated with an activity.
- e. Hazard Control - is the prior allocation of physical, human and procedural resources to eliminate or to minimise, as far as is reasonably practicable, the risk to safety or health from a hazard.
- f. Head of Work Unit - refers to Head of School or Director or where practicable a delegated person.

Section 2 - Policy Statement

Part A - Policy Declaration

(2) This policy sets out the responsibilities of employees, students, contractors and visitors and specifies processes to minimise health and safety risk during authorised fieldwork.

Part B - Policy Description

Objectives

(3) The purpose of this policy is to assist in the assessment of risks associated with fieldwork and to minimise recognised risks and potential hazards.

Scope

(4) This policy applies to University employees, students, contractors, visitors (including workers as defined in the relevant work health and safety legislation) and other approved participants involved in outdoor fieldwork. When employees, students, contractors or visitors undertake clinical, education or other placements at sites other than the University, the safety guidelines of that site eg hospital, school prevail over the Outdoor Fieldwork policy and must be complied with.

Part C - Content and Implementation

Head of Work Unit Responsibilities

(5) The Head of Work Unit must give written approval for all fieldwork before it commences. If the Head of Work Unit is not satisfied the fieldwork safety plan provided by the Fieldwork Leader is adequate, the fieldwork may be postponed or cancelled.

(6) The Head of Work Unit is to ensure employees involved in fieldwork are suitably qualified, have current certification and specialist training is made available where applicable (e.g. rough terrain driving skills, first aid, boating skills, safe chainsaw operation). In instances where students will be involved in fieldwork activities such as driving motor vehicles, the Head of Work Unit will also ensure that they have suitable qualifications and specialist training.

(7) The Head of Work Unit is responsible for developing and implementing procedures for fieldwork activities in accordance with University policy. Fieldwork safety plans and risk assessments provided by fieldwork leaders must be maintained in a fieldwork register held by the work unit.

Fieldwork Leader Responsibilities

(8) Prior to departing on fieldwork, the fieldwork leader is required to provide their Head of Work Unit with a proposed written fieldwork safety plan. Where information is not immediately available, estimates may be made. When the relevant information becomes available, the Head of Work Unit must be notified in writing as soon as possible. The fieldwork safety plan must include matters such as:

- a. the location to be visited, purpose of fieldwork, duration of the field trip, means of transport and route(s) of travel;
- b. expected return date and time;
- c. medical conditions or medical requirements of participants;
- d. emergency contact and next of kin details for all participants;
- e. the names and roles of each person participating and the lines of responsibility;
- f. communication arrangements;
- g. a description of activities to be undertaken during field work and the risks associated with these activities, including a risk assessment;
- h. the certification or competencies that will be required and who holds these; and
- i. alternative exit arrangements.

(9) The fieldwork safety plan may contain sensitive information and therefore confidentiality must be maintained.

(10) The Fieldwork Leader is to complete and provide the Head of Work Unit with a risk assessment in line with the University's Work, Health and Safety (WHS) Risk Management Procedure and implement any necessary hazard controls. The fieldwork leader should follow relevant work unit risk management procedures.

(11) The following should be considered in the risk assessment:

- a. the nature of the work and the area where it is done, including remoteness, terrain, likely weather conditions including possible weather extremes, total fire bans and the possibility of encountering dangerous animals or plants;
- b. the availability of transport and assistance in case of breakdown or accident;
- c. the use of dangerous chemicals, explosives, mechanical equipment, electrical equipment or harmful biological agents in the work being done;
- d. work in or near water;

- e. working at heights or below the ground;
- f. generation of hazardous wastes;
- g. timing and length of travel;
- h. adequacy of water and other provisions such as food, fuel, shelter, etc.;
- i. the fitness, health and competencies of the people in the group (e.g. known medical conditions, swimming ability, etc. assists in deciding whether risks are acceptable or not, and planning alternatives); and
- j. suitable maps should be available for routes to and from the fieldwork site, and of the fieldwork area, including information about relevant support services etc.

(12) The Fieldwork Leader must ensure:

- a. safety instructions specific to the situation are provided to every member of the fieldwork party, including their WHS responsibilities [see clause (13)];
- b. a copy of the fieldwork safety plan and risk assessment are available for use in emergencies;
- c. fieldwork participants are dressed appropriately for the type of fieldwork being undertaken, the expected weather conditions; e.g. enclosed footwear, hats and access to a broad spectrum sunscreen (minimum of SPF 30);
- d. adequate protection from exposure to the sun is maintained during the course of the field excursion;
- e. participants behave in an orderly manner for the entire field excursion;
- f. the party includes employees trained in first aid and first aid equipment is available;
- g. appropriate means of communication, e.g. a mobile or satellite telephone, is available during the field trip; and
- h. local, state and federal laws are adhered to during the fieldwork.

Fieldwork Participant Responsibilities

(13) Fieldwork participants:

- a. have a responsibility under WHS legislation to take all reasonably practicable steps to protect the health and safety of themselves and others and cooperate with the University to enable it to comply with any legislative requirements;
- b. must accept the directions of the Fieldwork Leader during the course of the field work; and
- c. must provide current next of kin and emergency contact details to the fieldwork leader prior to undertaking fieldwork. Details provided will be treated confidentially.

Size and Composition of a Fieldwork Party

(14) Fieldwork parties must consist of a minimum of two people. To enable a fieldwork participant or student to work alone, the Head of Work Unit may waive this requirement where:

- a. it can be clearly demonstrated that potential hazards in the fieldwork area are minimal;
- b. a written risk assessment has been completed and it can be clearly demonstrated that potential hazards are minimal; and
- c. the person has relevant fieldwork experience and training.

(15) A written risk assessment must be completed by anyone working alone in the field. This written risk assessment must be discussed with the Head of Work Unit and signed by the person undertaking the fieldwork and the Head of Work Unit before the fieldwork is commenced.

(16) Anyone working alone in the field must, where reasonably practicable, make daily contact with a nominated person.

(17) Fieldwork involving students must have an acceptable employee to student ratio so that appropriate transport and supervision arrangements can be implemented. An acceptable ratio of employees to students would depend on:

- a. the prior training, experience and maturity of the students; and
- b. the nature of the fieldwork.

(18) The employee to student ratio must be established based on risk associated with the fieldwork, and normally, in undergraduate courses, there would be an upper limit of one to twenty five. For routine fieldwork with an established safe history, a larger ratio may be acceptable. Careful consideration should be given by the Head of Work Unit before approval is given to fieldwork involving a larger student to employee ratio.

Vehicle Safety

(19) All drivers must hold a current driver's licence of the class suitable for the vehicle they are intending to drive. It is recommended that anyone who is required to drive a 4WD vehicle is offered training in off road or rough terrain driving skills. This training may be provided by suitably competent technical employees.

(20) All drivers must comply with the University's [Driving Safety Policy](#).

(21) Any vehicle used for fieldwork must be appropriate for the work and terrain where the fieldwork is to occur.

(22) Any luggage and/or equipment in the vehicle is to be secured and firmly packed.

(23) Where a vehicle has become bogged or broken down and a recovery is necessary, only personnel who have been trained in the safe method of using recovery equipment should be involved.

Road Safety

(24) Where the fieldwork is undertaken along major or busy roads 'Caution - Students on Road' signs are to be erected 300 metres from the field site, in both directions.

(25) Luminescent jackets are to be worn by one person at the start of the area of interest and by one person at the end of the area of interest and these two people are to:

- a. inform the fieldwork party that a vehicle is approaching the fieldwork area; and
- b. ensure that members of the fieldwork party do not venture out of the fieldwork area during the excursion stop.

(26) Fieldwork leaders are to ensure all fieldwork participants under their supervision are accounted for before leaving the excursion stop.

Foot Traverse Research and Work

(27) The risks associated with foot traverse fieldwork depend on factors such as the weather, terrain, vegetation, and topography. A risk assessment must be undertaken and discussed with the Head of Work Unit prior to commencing the fieldwork. The risk assessment must be signed by the fieldwork leader and the Head of Work Unit, and forwarded to the Manager, Workplace Health and Safety.

Airborne Research

(28) All aircraft pilots must have the appropriate Australian Pilot's Licence with a supporting current medical certificate.

(29) All airborne operations must be conducted in accordance with relevant government regulations.

Marine Research

(30) Where boats are used, employees involved must be familiar with relevant maritime legislation e.g. NSW Boating Handbook published by the Waterways Authority.

(31) All coxswains of motorised water vessels must have a licence issued by the Maritime Services Board suitable for the vessel they are intending to operate.

(32) Only licensed and appropriately trained personnel should be in charge of boats. If crossing bars, the operator of the boat must have a Coxswain certificate of competency.

(33) Buoyancy vests must be provided for everyone on the boat. Buoyancy vests must be worn for all bar crossings and during heavy seas.

Incidents and Accidents

(34) In the event of personal injury, first aid treatment must be provided promptly. If necessary, the relevant emergency services are to be contacted.

(35) Where safe to do so, other precautions should be taken at the accident site, i.e. smothering fires, removing persons from the site, and removing ignition sources.

(36) If emergency services have been notified, the University (Head of Work Unit, Manager, Workplace Health and Safety or Security), and next of kin are to be notified at the earliest available opportunity.

(37) An [Incident, Accident and Hazard Report](#) be completed for all incidents and accidents.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Issues

(38) Fieldwork is a University sponsored activity and accordingly the University's [Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Policy](#) applies.

Misconduct

(39) Employees and students taking part in outdoor fieldwork are subject to University misconduct processes.

Status and Details

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Head of Work Unit	Kath Drew Director, Human Resources
Enquiries Contact	HR Services