

## Fieldwork Safety

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### 1. Purpose and scope

This procedure outlines principles and practices for ensuring the health and safety of staff, students and volunteers who participate in university teaching, research and experiential fieldwork. The intent of this procedure is to provide guidance and direction to facilitate the appropriate planning at a local level on the safe conduct of the University's fieldwork activities.

For local management of specific fieldwork activities, university workplaces (Academic Units, Central Units and Research Institutes) shall develop their own operational guidelines or standard operating procedures (SOPs) in accordance with the intent of this procedure. Fieldwork Leaders (see Definitions) need to comply with the relevant local fieldwork SOPs.

**Fieldwork** varies in nature and duration and refers to trips, excursions, tours, camps or similar activities entailing (but not limited to):

- Visits to rural or remote areas
- Water, agricultural, surveying or construction activities
- Research activities (eg collecting geological samples or biological specimens)
- Collaborative activities in the field conducted by or with other institutions, and
- Offshore study tours.

'Fieldwork' **does not** apply to:

- Placements i.e. work experience programs or professional placements as part of a study program carried out at non-university facilities. Organisers of such activities should ensure that the participating external host organisation has appropriate mechanisms for managing health and safety. Further information is contained in the **Placement Guidelines** (see section 5).
- Travelling to or from and attendance at conferences or other events (including offshore travel)
- Professional development leave
- Student exchange programs
- Offshore teaching at other institutions
- Working from home
- Brief trips off campus for administrative or shopping activities.

## 2. Definitions

**Fieldwork** - is an authorised university activity involving research, teaching or experiential programs undertaken by staff, students or authorised volunteers at a location off campus, but where the University is responsible for the safety of its staff, students and volunteers and others exposed to their activities. Fieldwork can be short-term (eg a half or one day field trip) or a multi-day activity.

**Fieldwork Coordinator** - is the University staff member who plans and organises the fieldwork (eg a lead researcher, or Program Services Manager)

**Fieldwork Leader** - is the person in the field with operational responsibility and direct control of all aspects of the defined fieldwork.

**Nominated Contact Person** - is a local delegated staff member with access to the **Fieldwork Detail (WHS 71)** (see Table 1), who is contactable in an emergency and/or available for general support for each fieldtrip.

**Fieldwork plan** - Is the result of considering all aspects of a fieldwork activity and the implications for safety. It is likely to include objectives, proposed itinerary, location, participants, start and finish dates, hazard identification, risk assessment and controls and emergency response options.

## 3. Roles and Responsibilities

The University has a primary duty of care under the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act, 2012, to ensure the health and safety of workers and other parties (students, volunteers, members of the community). The WHS legislation requires a systematic approach to planning and organising fieldwork and identifying and mitigating the potential safety risks associated with this work.

**Academic/Central Units and Research Institutes** are responsible for:

- Ensuring a system is in place for assessment, endorsement and review of all fieldwork activities
- Approving the health and safety arrangements for fieldwork activities.

**Fieldwork Coordinators** are responsible for:

- Planning all fieldwork activities in accordance with this procedure and other university procedures and any relevant industry standards
- Ensuring effective risk management, supervision and control for the intended field activity
- Compiling the relevant documentation (see Table 2) to support the conduct of the field activity
- Ensuring all participants are aware, prior to departure, of all relevant field trip information, including health and safety aspects via distribution of a **Fieldwork Information Notice (WHS72)** or similar.

**Fieldwork Leaders** are responsible for:

- Effectively managing the conduct of the fieldwork activity, including the responsibility for overall health and safety management
- Reporting all fieldwork incidents, hazards and injuries
- Communicating with the **Nominated Contact Person** on any significant incident or concern.

**Staff, students and volunteers** are responsible for:

- Understanding all aspects of the proposed fieldwork
- Providing to the **Fieldwork Leader** a current **Fieldwork and Medical Acknowledgment (WHS73)**
- Not placing themselves or others at risk during fieldwork
- Following reasonable instructions
- Reporting fieldwork incidents, hazards and injury to the **Fieldwork Leader**.

**Nominated Contact Person** is responsible for:

- Maintaining a current **Fieldwork Detail (WHS71)** for all groups conducting fieldwork
- Notifying the Executive Dean/ Unit if there is an incident or a party fails to return from the field
- Initiating an emergency response if appropriate in accordance with the fieldwork plan.

## 4. Procedure

### 4.1 Risk management

Authorised University fieldwork has a diversity of foreseeable hazards and some of these may expose participants to risk. Fieldwork as a risk category should be recorded in the local area Hazard Register (**WHS1**). The University WHS procedure **Managing workplace health and safety risks** provides guidance on the approach to identifying foreseeable hazards and developing suitable controls to minimise risk to participants.

This fieldwork procedure outlines a consideration process for assessing risks and determining the best control measures making use of a checklist and forms to take account of the risks commonly associated with fieldwork and the control measures known to be required or effective.

In instances where the fieldwork activity is less standard, or the risks presented are at a higher or more complex level a more formal risk management analysis may be required. The form **General Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (WHS2)** is available to assist a more detailed risk analysis of the fieldwork activity or specific aspects of the activity.

A range of fieldwork activities require special precautions to ensure health and safety. These activities include: boating; operating at height; working on, in or near water; using high voltage equipment; bushwalking; operating heavy equipment; handling hazardous substances; mining or geological activities; working at night; being exposed to climatic conditions; camping; contacting flora and fauna; driving long distances or off-road; or operating independently and/or remotely. It is not recommended that participants work alone in isolated areas. A determination on the amount of supervision required is to be identified as part of the risk assessment.

For further information refer to the **Fieldwork Hazards and Risks webpage**.

### 4.2 The Fieldwork Plan

#### 4.2.1 The planning process

All University fieldwork shall be a formal planned process. As a guide for local planning the following stages should be considered:

1. Seek pre-approval for conduct of the fieldwork
2. Plan the proposed activity and complete a risk assessment for the foreseeable hazards and risks
3. Gain approval from appropriate manager to conduct the planned fieldwork activity
4. Distribute the fieldwork information to participants and the Nominated Contact Person
5. Undertake the planned fieldwork
6. Conduct any required post activity review /action / administration.

The planning process should ultimately adopt a risk management approach, in which the fieldwork activity, its location and overall level of risk should directly influence the amount and detail of planning that is undertaken.

Staff, students and volunteers involved in fieldwork activities shall be provided with complete information to allow adequate preparation and participation in the planned activity. They are to be advised of particular hazardous work activities or conditions and provided a prior opportunity for consultation and comment.

#### 4.2.2 Planning considerations and documentation

**Table 1** presents a checklist of points for consideration in the development of a fieldwork plan. This list is not exhaustive and additional factors may need to be considered.

**Table 2** describes the key university forms to be filled out prior to carrying out the fieldwork.



**Table 1: Fieldwork planning considerations**

**Staffing and participants**

- Are specialist skills and experience required by staff?
- Are staff appropriately experienced and / or competent for the activity?
- Supervision ratios should be considered in light of nominated standards or based upon skills and experience of participants. At times fieldworkers may be under indirect supervision. The ratio of participants to leaders may be adjusted to reflect the risks involved and to ensure that these risks are minimised.
- Do participants meet the minimum skill, experience and qualification requirements for the intended activities? If not, how and when will pre-training occur?
- Relevant vaccinations
- Policy on drugs and alcohol
- Personal needs list.

**Logistics**

- Accommodation
- Catering arrangements (including any special dietary requirements)
- Availability and suitability of water
- Clothing relevant to conditions.

**Transport**

- Type and number of vehicles (suitability and condition, spare parts and tools, need for trailers)
- Legal requirements for vehicles, trailers, driver licences and logbooks
- Detailed itineraries and maps
- Four wheel or off-road driving in remote or rough terrain
- Hazards associated with long distance driving and fatigue
- Offshore travel arrangements

**Equipment**

- Detailed equipment requirements
- Is any specialist equipment required? (eg: vehicle recovery, boating, electrical, plant, camping, cooking, radios, fire-fighting)
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Hazardous chemicals storage, carriage and use
- Serviceability and integrity of any equipment and plant that will be used.

**First Aid - see also section 4.3**

- Appropriate first aid kits provided.
- Staff trained in first aid.

**Location specific**

- Weather forecasts and conditions and how this may impact on your planned activity
- Licences, permits and advising relevant authorities (eg: National Parks, landowners)
- Working offshore considerations (security, disease, political climate)
- Remote location considerations (supervisory ratio, access to medical support and emergency services, first aid, communication and contact systems, vehicle suitability, actions on accident, breakdown or delay)
- Hygiene and ablution considerations
- An Activity / Orientation Brief to participants on arrival in location.

**Communication - see also section 4.4**

- Distribute relevant information to participants in advance of the field trip (**WHS72**)
- Identify an appropriate communication system and a frequency of contact (may require satellite phone or satellite signalling device in remote areas)
- A nominated contact person (not on the trip) and their actions if required to provide assistance.

**Emergency response plan**

- Think through how you would manage a medical, fire, accident or evacuation situation
- This must be stated in the **Fieldwork Detail (WHS71)** held by the **Nominated Contact Person**
- Have a pre-established approach for notifying emergency services and next of kin in the event of a critical incident.
- If fieldwork is offshore, familiarise yourself with the Emergency Response Protocol - Offshore.
- Consider what action will occur if a group fails to check in after a certain time period / or scheduled contact.

**Table 2: Description of fieldwork forms**

**Fieldwork Detail (WHS71)**

- A copy of this plan and any other relevant documents (eg maps) shall be kept by the **Nominated Contact Person** delegated in the workplace for the duration of the fieldwork. A copy of this plan is also to be held by the **Fieldwork Leader** during the fieldwork.

**Fieldwork Information Notice (WHS 72)**

- **WHS72** is one of the most important mechanisms for ensuring all relevant health and safety information is passed to participants. This form should be developed for all types of fieldwork. This form can be compiled for an individual fieldtrip or used to describe a Study Period's or an ongoing research activity's worth of fieldwork.

**Fieldwork and Medical Acknowledgment (WHS73)**

- **WHS73** (or similar) must be completed by all participants (including staff) on overnight fieldwork.
- Include information provided by the participant on any relevant medical conditions, medication and any special dietary needs.
- A contact person in case of ill health or injury should also be obtained.
- If students/volunteers are under 18 years of age a parent or guardian is to sign the form to confer consent.
- The participant shall indicate if medical advice has been sought and is to disclose to the **Fieldwork Leader** any health or medical restrictions that may affect their ability to participate safely in any activity.
- Completed forms for all participants are to be provided to the **Fieldwork Leader**.
- Information provided must be treated as confidential unless non-disclosure creates a risk to other participants.
- *The completed WHS73 forms are to be carried by the **Fieldwork Leader** in the field. These need to be readily available in a medical emergency.*

**General Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (WHS2)**

- **WHS2** can be used to guide and record a more formal or detailed risk assessment including the identification of additional safety controls required.

### 4.3 First aid

The provision of first aid kits and first aid trained staff for fieldwork is to be provided in accordance with the University's WHS procedure for **First Aid**. In fieldwork locations without timely access to medical and ambulance services a ratio of one trained first aider to ten participants is recommended. A Standard Workplace First Aid Kit is recommended for university workplaces. However, this should be considered in terms of practicality for field use. A risk assessment approach can be used to determine the types of hazards likely to cause injury and the quantity of items carried. Additional modules may be required where certain hazards have been identified. Remote, outdoor or burns modules are examples that could be added to a fieldwork first aid kit.

### 4.4 Communication

The method and frequency of communication is to be stated in the **Fieldwork Detail**. Mobile phone coverage, satellite phones and other signaling devices (such as a SPOT device) may need to be considered. Where possible, contact should be made at agreed intervals with the **Nominated Contact Person**. In some fieldwork locations it may be more appropriate to set up an alternate communication arrangement with a reputable contact point (eg: local police station, National Parks office, or station manager). The key principle is that communication should occur on a regular basis and that there must be a documented emergency back-up plan in the event that contact is not made.



#### 4.5 Non–university personnel

The University recognises that non-university staff are occasionally invited on and participate in fieldwork. The relevant Manager has the responsibility for authorising this involvement. The **Fieldwork Coordinator** must ensure that non-university personnel are made aware of their responsibilities and the hazards associated with the activity. The names of non-university participants involved in fieldwork must be included in the **Fieldwork Detail** documentation.

#### 4.6 Insurance and incident reporting

The University provides insurances for staff, students and volunteers whilst participating in university approved fieldwork activities.

Any incident or injury to university staff, students and volunteers is to be reported using the University's online **Hazard/Incident Reporting & Investigation System**. If an online report cannot be made within the required 48 hours, the **Fieldwork Leader** should endeavour to contact their **Nominated Contact Person** and provide details of the occurrence. The nominated staff member can commence the on-line reporting process.

A person who is disruptive or failing to comply with the UniSA Code of Conduct for Students and adversely affecting the health and safety of participants during a field activity may be removed from the activity by the **Fieldwork Leader** and sent home at their own cost.

## 4. University Forms / Documents

For further advice on managing risks in university workplaces, including procedures, guidance, forms and training courses, please visit the Safety & Wellbeing website.

#### [Safety & Wellbeing website](#)

- Fieldwork Hazards and Risks Webpage
- Managing Workplace Health and Safety Risks
- First Aid
- Travel and Work Offshore Safety
- Driving Vehicles While Working Guidelines
- Placement Guidelines
- Critical Incident Management
- WHS71 – Fieldwork Detail
- WHS72 – Fieldwork Information Notice
- WHS73 – Fieldwork and Medical Acknowledgement (*formerly WHS 39*)
- WHS02 – General Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment

#### [University Emergency Management](#)

- Emergency response - offshore.

#### [Online Hazard/Incident Reporting & Investigation System](#)