

Field Safety Guide Conducting University Business Off-Campus

While on University business, all staff and students have a legal responsibility to adhere to all University Health & Safety policies and guidelines, and take all practicable steps to ensure the safety of themselves and others in the workplace, on and off campus.

The purpose of this document is to guide researchers and supervisors through the fundamental requirements of managing the safety of off-campus activities at all stages from planning through to a safe return. This document therefore applies to all University business conducted off-campus and includes;

- All academic research and contract activities,
- All student research activities,
- All teaching related field trips.

It also applies to all School of Environment disciplines regardless of the location of the field activity (natural, residential, rural, industrial, metropolitan, or remote) and regardless of activity (sampling, interviewing, measuring, liaising, etc.).

This document is in accordance with the University of Auckland Field Work Safety Guideline (found on the School website and University staff intranet). The University policy must be read and understood.

Fundamental Requirements

Before undertaking any field activities, you must have done the following;

1. **Read & understood this document and the University Field Work Safety Guideline**, and acknowledged this with your signature on the School's Health & Safety Register. This will be renewed on an annual basis.
2. **Assessed the hazards and devised a hazard management plan** (complete a *Hazard Assessment & Management form*). Specific health & safety information or training must be sought to adequately assess and manage the hazards relating to any specific environments, activities, or equipment. A copy of this must be kept on file at the School's Reception.
3. **Communicated your intentions** by keeping key contacts informed of your whereabouts and wellbeing as often as necessary. This is facilitated by completing a *Field Trip Communication Plan* and providing an itinerary (if applicable). A copy of this must be lodged with the School Health and Safety Officer.
4. **All accidents and dangerous situations must be reported to the Health and Safety Officer.**

Further information is available on the School's Health & safety website, under

www.env.auckland.ac.nz
click on →**About Us** →**Health & Safety**

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Hazard Assessment – at the planning stage

The first step in planning a safe field trip is to conduct a hazard assessment. This involves identifying hazards or potential hazards which may impact you (or your field party). This is facilitated by completing a *Hazard Assessment & Management (HAM) Form*. This must be approved by a Health & Safety Officer and, when deemed necessary, the Director before leaving the campus.

It is important that those completing the hazard assessment must be capable and experienced enough to identify the hazards at the planning stage and during the course of the trip. If necessary, do a reconnaissance trip to survey the site and talk to local residents and authorities to gain their support, advice, and approval.

Environment – what actual or potential physical hazards exist at the site? Specific settings will pose their own specific hazards (e.g., alpine, metropolitan, coastal or offshore settings). Some sites are managed under another set of Health & Safety regulations (e.g., mining or quarry sites, farms, industrial sites). If so, you must follow the site's procedures as long as they do not compromise the University's H&S own standards.

Expected physical conditions – identify and plan for likely conditions that will affect the safety of the activity. This especially includes weather, tides, and daylight. Use available resources such as Metservice and Swellmap to gain as up-to-date and accurate forecasts as possible, and heed all warnings appropriately.

Equipment – identify all the equipment to be used on the field trip and determine whether the transport or use of the equipment has the potential to cause harm. Is there a special Health & Safety guideline or procedure already in place for the equipment?

Activities – identify all the proposed activities for the trip and identify what potential hazards may be created by these activities. Is there a separate Health & Safety guideline or procedure in place for the activity? Are there enough participants to perform the activity safely?

Social/Cultural considerations – are you placing yourself or others into a potentially hazardous situation in your interaction with individuals or groups? For private or managed sites, it is essential to obtain information and permission from the landowner/ occupier/ manager and comply with their requirements (eg., DoC permits). Where appropriate, contact should be made with appropriate people to ensure that cultural etiquettes are followed and areas of spiritual significance duly observed.

Participants – The field trip supervisor must assess the fitness and abilities of all participants (including themselves) and identify potential problems. This involves requesting relevant information from all participants which may impact the safety of themselves or their colleagues. This includes:

- Medical conditions or injuries and associated medication,

- Other conditions - e.g., vertigo, claustrophobia, severe phobias,
- Insufficient skills to perform tasks required - e.g. inability to swim, poor level of fitness, inability to understand English,
- Lack of appropriate attire or necessary equipment.

It is the responsibility of the individual participants to disclose this information. Confidentiality must be respected where possible. Under the Privacy Act (1993), all documented information must be destroyed immediately after its required purpose is fulfilled.

The participation of visitors on field trips must be considered carefully and given special approval. All such participants are to be treated as visitors to the University workplace. The participation of children must be considered very carefully in regard to child safety and their impact on the trip.

Transport – what modes of transport are to be used to get to and from the site? Is the route safe (consider onroad and off-road conditions)? Participants and equipment must be transported legally and safely. Driver fatigue must be considered and managed appropriately.

Hazard Management

Once each hazard has been identified, there must be a plan to manage them. The standard three dimensions of hazard management for significant hazards are;

1. **Elimination** – total removal of the hazard. In the field, this option is often not possible.
2. **Isolation** – containment or avoidance of the hazard. A field trip or field activity may have to be modified to avoid direct interaction with the identified hazard.
3. **Mitigation** – minimizing the threat posed by a hazard through proactive hazard management (e.g. obtaining skills, safety equipment, safety procedures, etc.)

To manage hazards in the field, the following is required;

Hazard information - all participants must seek or be provided with relevant hazard information including;

- specific hazards likely to be encountered during the activity;
- special attributes or skills required by each participant;
- any particular clothing, protective clothing, footwear, bedding, and food/drink requirements, • what to do in an emergency.

This information should be provided as a document or handout to be signed by the participants as being read and understood and filed for later reference.

Appropriate attributes or skills – all work undertaken must be within the mental and physical **capability** of the every participant. Each participant must have the **skills** and experience to identify and manage the hazards effectively or be supervised by suitably skilled people. For certain activities, environments or equipment, a form of official training and **certification** may be required (e.g., height safety certification, alpine safety course, first aid certification).

Suitable resources – specialised resources required for particular activities must be provided (e.g., caving equipment or translators). Safety equipment must be fit for purpose. Personal safety equipment provided by participants must be inspected and documented as fit for use by suitably a qualified person/agent.

Participants – there must be suitable numbers of participants to undertake the activity safely. Participants must avoid working in the field alone especially in remote areas, around water, or high risk urban areas.

Appropriate level of direct supervision – for teaching field trips there must be at least one supervisor allocated to each field trip, preferably two. The staff-student ratio must reflect;

- the optimum direct supervision required to effectively manage a hazard, and
- the optimum support required to effectively manage an incident.

For lowest hazard fieldwork, a ratio of at least one supervisor per 20 participants is recommended.

External Providers – If a field trip involves the engagement of external contractors, such as boat/kayak/rafting, helicopter, light aircraft, 4 Wheel drive operators, they must be requested to provide their Health & Safety Policy/Plan. Such documentation should include Maritime or Civil Aviation certifications/registrations and reference checks (this may include a check with the local safety agency). Operators should not be used if they are unable to supply appropriate documentation.

First aid qualified staff - depending upon the situation, there should be at least one qualified first aider per 20 participants, with a fully stocked field first aid kit. Careful consideration should be made for trips where participants disperse into separate groups or individuals. It is recommended that people regularly involved in field activities attend a first aid course appropriate to their needs (e.g. outdoor first aid).

Communication Plan – appropriate communication networks must be established to ensure that,

- individuals or field parties can be contacted or located if missing,
- emergency situations can be resolved as quickly as possible.

This is covered in more detail below.

Emergency Management Plan – consideration must be made as to what action would be taken in the event of injury or other emergency. This is discussed below.

Communication Plan

Effective communication measures must be established to ensure that, if an individual or group encounter trouble or go missing, procedures and means are in place to ensure that assistance is provided as soon as practicable.

Communication Equipment

Appropriate forms of communication must be taken into the field. In most cases, personal cellphones are sufficient if coverage is adequate.

Special allowance should be made for field areas which are out of normal communication range. In cases such as boat work, a VHF radio is mandatory. Personal emergency locator beacons (EPIRBs) or satellite phones should be considered for remote field work. The School has a limited number of EPIRBs available to use if necessary. Satellite phones are available externally for hire.

Communication Plans

The details of contacts, itinerary, and participants must be documented and approved. In minor cases, email correspondence will suffice but it is preferred that a *Field Trip*

Communication Plan is completed and approved for all field activities and copies are distributed to the individual or group involved, the School contact(s), and external contact(s). All correspondence must be approved and maintained by the Health & Safety Officers.

Establish a schedule of check-in calls if appropriate (especially if working in remote locations).

Advise relevant people of any change in itinerary.

When field parties disperse for their activities, the field trip supervisor shall maintain a system which will facilitate the location of groups and individuals should they go missing.

At the end of each activity or day in the field, remember to account for all participants and notify your safe return to the relevant contacts.

For students undertaking their postgraduate field research, it is strongly advised that they keep in regular contact and discussion with their supervisor(s).

Network of contacts

An effective network of contacts must be established. The contact numbers for these must be documented (preferably on a *Field Trip Communication Plan*) and distributed as to each contact. These contacts can include;

- 1. Field Researcher or Field Trip Supervisor involved**
- 2. School contact(s)**
- 3. Participants (if practical)**
- 4. Emergency services**
- 5. External contact(s)** (optional) – (e.g. accommodation managers, land owners, family, etc.). These contacts must be capable and willing to take appropriate action should you need them or fail to return on schedule.

If necessary, a contact person can be entrusted to monitor the well being of the individual or group involved, confirming their safe return. It is often most effective to have a local contact, family member or friend for this.

The contacts must be aware of what steps to take should the field party not return as agreed. Should there be concern for the field party, there is a procedure on the rear of the *Field Trip Communication Plan* to notify relevant contacts initiate a search through the Police.

Emergency Management Plan

Do you and your field party have the expertise, capability, and resources to deal with an emergency? An appropriate emergency management plan must be formulated prior to the field trip being undertaken and this must be communicated to all participants. These factors are addressed on the back of the Communication Plan.

A typical emergency management plan will follow these basic steps; **1. Safety**

– get yourself and others out of immediate or further danger.

2. First Aid – tend to serious injuries.

3. Contact emergency services – arrange for emergency services and/or medical attention, if required.

4. **Regroup** – ensure all participants are accounted for and are safe. Tend to those in distress. Arrange evacuation if necessary.
5. **Review and Plan** – review the incident, noting any information that may be important. Discuss the continuation or non-continuation of the field trip.
6. **Contact the School** – contact the relevant parties within the school to advise of the incident and to notify any changes in itinerary.

Special consideration must be made for the scenario of missing persons.

- Do you have the means to contact them (e.g. cellphone)?
- Could you accurately determine their last known position?
- Could you accurately describe them and their appearance to Police?

Hazard Assessment and Management as an ongoing process

Risk assessment and management must be maintained for the duration of the field trip to ensure continued safety. This means actively monitoring external conditions and the condition of the participants and keeping participants informed of potentially hazardous situations as they develop.

Management of participants on teaching field trips

In addition to hazard information, participants must also be given guidelines and rules relating to their individual responsibilities for safety and general conduct. This can be assisted by the following documents;

- *Information for Student Field Trip Participants*
- *Student Field Trip Acknowledgement Form*

Field trip supervisors have prime responsibility for health and safety of fieldwork activities under their control, and must ensure the safety of the field party throughout each stage of the trip. Supervisors cannot be completely responsible for the actions of those in their charge, but are expected to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of themselves and others.

“After-hours” – The field trip supervisor is responsible for those under their supervision for the entire field trip, including “after hours”. While field trip supervisors cannot always be held responsible for the after-hours activities of those in the field group, all practicable steps must be taken to ensure the safety of the group (e.g., by laying down rules of conduct).

Alcohol and drugs - The University does not endorse the consumption of alcohol on field trips. This needs to be considered along with the extent of potential consumption, the impact on other field trip participants and general public, safe transport, and management of adverse situations.

The use of illicit drugs is not permitted. The use and effect of prescription drugs must be considered in any participant’s suitability to attend the trip.

Use of private vehicles - If planning a teaching field trip, the use of private vehicles must be considered carefully and is not recommended. Students intending to drive their own vehicles or be transported by another student to a field site must complete a *Student Driver Agreement Form* or a *Student Passenger Agreement Form*. These must be submitted to the respective course coordinator for approval.