

Field Safety Plan (New England field work edition*)

Introduction

The goal of this safety plan is to ensure that all researchers in the lab are able to safely, productively, and enjoyably participate in research activities in the field. We all share this world and its environment, and it is important to ensure that everyone has equal experience in learning how it works (our research) regardless of background, identity, gender, etc. This diversity often corresponds with different perspectives that are very likely to lead to further insights than if only one perspective is represented! Unfortunately, members of under-represented groups may face additional challenges that threaten their safety in the lab and field, while doing their research. This document will be discussed by the lab PI with all incoming members of the lab, and at least at one annual lab meeting. It is important that everyone in the group is aware of safety concerns and policies and feels comfortable talking about their concerns with respect to safety. Our research team is part of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, where it is our culture/practice to support all researchers and have open discussions regarding these issues.

Enjoyable, high-quality research can only be conducted when you feel safe, secure, and supported, both within your research team or lab group and while you are away conducting field research. All group members are thus dedicated to a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, and/or religion. We do not tolerate harassment by and/or of members of our group in any form, and we ask all members of the community to conform to the Code of Conduct stated below.

Racial Risk Assessment

The field research covered in this document assumes research takes place primarily in New England, across the rural to urban gradient. Research may take place in a wide variety of places ranging from remote, relatively pristine areas (mountains, forests, coastlines) to heavily human dominated (urban streams, rivers, and lakes, urban forests). The vast majority of New England is white, especially more rural areas. This provides the context for risk assessment.

Encounters with local people may include: homeowners abutting the research site, community members going for walks, local sportspeople (hunters, fishers), people driving by and stopping, and local law enforcement. Many if not most such encounters are positive. They would like to learn more about what you are doing. Some encounters may be neutral, with minimal interactions because, for example, people are busy in their thoughts or in a hurry. Some however, may be negative, either due to racism, sexism, or a general mistrust of what a stranger is doing in a place that they often visit.

The PI, working with grad students, has the responsibility for getting landowner permissions for accessing field sites. Landowners should know who/how many students will access the site and when.

For people of color, the risk of negative encounters increases. All members of the research team should be aware of this dynamic, and should do what they can to step in and support students of color.

This is a generic description for a risk assessment. Different types of research locations will have different risks, and so it is important for the lab PI to be aware of these and develop more detailed assessments for these other locations.

In general, students/researchers should never go into the field alone. If one needs to go to the field alone, they should set up a check-in plan with the lab PI or other lab mate. Team members who are people of color are at greater risk of negative encounters. If negative encounters occur, it is important for all other team members to work together to diffuse the situation. If someone is hostile, one person(s) should attempt to wrap up the sampling, while the other person(s) can discuss with the hostile person.

Code of Conduct (based on code provided by the River Basin Research Group)

- All communication, be it online or in person, should be appropriate for a professional audience, and be considerate of people from different cultural backgrounds. Sexual language and imagery is not appropriate at any time.
- Be kind to others and do not insult or put down other group members.
- Behave professionally. Remember that harassment and sexist, racist, or exclusionary jokes are not appropriate.
- Harassment includes offensive verbal comments related to gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, religion, sexual images in public spaces, deliberate intimidation, stalking, following, harassing photography or recording, sustained disruption of discussions, inappropriate physical contact, and unwelcome sexual attention.
- Participants asked to stop any harassing behavior are expected to comply immediately.
- Contribute to discussions in meetings with a constructive, positive approach
- Be mindful of talking over others when discussing in groups, and be willing to hear out the ideas of others.

Pre-departure checklist of discussions within the field team

All students/researchers should work in teams of at least two people.

The lab PI should be proactive in asking their students/researchers what they need to feel comfortable and safe while conducting field work and this conversation should be revisited each year or at the beginning of a new project. All students/researchers should raise concerns about safety with the lab PI and other members of the field team. This document can serve as a good starting point.

All field teams should contact the lab PI and NREN Department liaison to let them know a) who is going in the field, b) when they are going in the field and when they expect to return, c) where they are going in the field. Upon return from the field, let the lab PI know that you have safely returned.

If the primary PI is unresponsive, then provide the information to the secondary lab contact (see contact information below).

If a researcher has to work in the field on their own, then it is important to also check in periodically throughout the day (recommended every 2 hours).

All research teams should include an institutional insignia (e.g. magnetic logo you can put on your vehicle, baseball caps) that lets locals know that you are associated with an institution. See the NREN department office to obtain one of these (pending). Additional resources to carry with you are an official letter from the department stating the nature of the work and all relevant permits, local, state or federal required for land access and data collection. If a researcher will be visiting multiple sites in the field season, the list of sites should be vetted with the PI for safety and permissions requirements prior to initiating the field work.

When appropriate, the PI should let local law enforcement know that they will have researchers in the area throughout the field season. If the students/researchers are comfortable communicating with law enforcement, then they should let them know each time they are in the field.

Procedures for documenting incidents in the field

Should any incidents occur, let the PI of the lab know immediately (call from field, or as soon as you return). These incidences are not your fault. We will use a standard reporting sheet of researchers' interaction with people, indicating date and time, questions asked, etc. If possible

and practicable, our researchers should ask for the person's name and affiliation. [[Also, should there be guidelines for our researchers to record on video their interaction with people who approach and question them? If we require this, our researchers can explain to people that they have to record the conversation because it is mandatory procedure.]]

See document on reporting violations also provided by the department (From Session 2).

Additional training and resources

Please see Demery & Pipkin, 2021 (including additional resources referenced therein)

Contact Information

Lab PI – cell phone number, email

Secondary Lab contact – cell phone number, email

Department contact - cell phone number, email

Bibliography

Demery, A.C., Pipkin, M.A. Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions. *Nat Ecol Evol* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-01328-5>