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Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Field and Laboratory Safety Plan for SPCMSC and WARC

Code of Conduct

This code of conduct applies at all times for USGS employees and affiliates. We specifically lay out this code of conduct in the safety plan to emphasize the importance of abiding by these principles in field or laboratory settings which may lend themselves to less formal behavior and interactions than in the office setting.

- a) Be kind to others; do not insult or otherwise antagonize other Center members.
- b) You are a professional. Your colleagues are professionals. Behave professionally, treat others with respect, and expect to be treated with respect.
- c) Treat all Center staff with equal respect, regardless of their official position or seniority. Do not use diminutive terms for team members based on USGS grade level, education background, federal versus contractor appointment, or job series/title.
- d) All communication, whether in the office, online, in the laboratory, or in the field, should be appropriate for a professional audience and should be considerate of people from different cultural backgrounds. Language or imagery of a sexual nature are not appropriate at any time.
- e) Practice [active listening](#). Be willing to hear and consider the ideas of others. Avoid talking over or interrupting others. Repeated interruptions of discussions can be a microaggression (a form of harassment).
- f) Contribute to discussions in meetings with a constructive, positive approach. Say “yes, and…” more than you say “no, but…” When you do say no, make sure it’s well-considered and not reactionary.
- g) 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, or religion. If a comment you make offends someone, apologize and do not suggest the comment isn’t offensive—you don’t know the details of everyone’s lived experiences, so you are in a position to decide only what is offensive to you.
- h) Deliberate intimidation, stalking, following, inappropriate physical contact, and unwelcome sexual attention are also examples of harassment; engaging in these activities will result in immediate dismissal from the laboratory/field activity and will be reported to your supervisor.
- i) Fieldwork often involves team members spending off-duty time together, and or living in close quarters. Be aware that not all members of the group will feel interested or comfortable with engaging in “after-hours” group interactions (e.g., dinners, recreational activities on weather days, etc). Consider the cultural or religious beliefs of team members to avoid exclusionary activities, such as planning group dinners at establishments that can’t accommodate dietary restrictions in the field team or pressuring a team member to enter an establishment that has racist symbols like a confederate flag displayed.

Training and Resources Available

The following relevant training courses are available to USGS employees. We highly recommend that some combination of these be **required** training for principal investigators, supervisors, and field team

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leaders. Because many of these trainings allow participants to practice and build their conflict-resolution skills, we suggest that required trainings be revisited every 2-3 years.

- (a) Intergenerational Sensitivity and Bystander Intervention training
- (b) Unconscious Bias training
- (c) High-security Threat Training (for international fieldwork)
- (d) Building safety culture
- (e) Your Role in Workplace Diversity
- (f) Preventing Discrimination in the Federal Workplace
- (g) USGS Anti-Harassment Policies for Non-Supervisors
- (h) Preventing Harassment and Promoting Respect
- (i) Harassment-It's No Joke

Racial Risk Assessment of field sites

At-risk individuals may belong to a variety of demographics that have been subject to discrimination and prejudice. This includes but is not limited to visible signs of race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, and/or religion. However, at-risk is fluid with respect to fieldwork and extends to any identity that is viewed as different from the local community in which the research is being conducted. In some cases, fieldwork presents a situation where a majority identity at their home institution can be the minority identity at the field site, whether nearby or international ([Demery and Pipkin, 2021](#)). In the case of the USGS, anti-federal government sentiments throughout the United States may also put individuals at risk in the field, especially when operating government vehicles or wearing gear that identifies them as government employees. The following points should be considered and discussed with field teams prior to conducting field work:

- a) Are there active hate-groups in the area? If so, what is known about them and who they may target? Are there symbols or gestures that they use to signal or identify one another? A good place to start might be exploring the ["Hate Map"](#) created by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC).
- b) Contact others (especially those who share an at-risk identity) that have previously used a field site at a location where there is a history of risk. It is recommended that researchers document all known cases of risk at that location.
- c) Is there a potential for confrontation with members of the community? Discuss with the team how they might respond. Establish that either an explicit threat or general discomfort with the social/cultural conditions is a safety issue (e.g., [Psychological Safety](#) is just as important as Physical Safety) and that leaving/not working a field is acceptable.
- d) Create a "get out" plan (who to contact, mode(s) of communication, what can be abandoned to get out quickly, etc.).
- e) Will anyone be working alone or out-of-communication with the team? What is the emergency communication plan?

We recognize that not all PIs will know where to find resources that will help address potential risks throughout the US. In order to facilitate the racial risk assessment outlined above, it would be helpful to aggregate information from a variety of resources, such as the "Hate Map" and other similar information portals, in one place. We support any effort, whether on behalf of Regional Safety Officers or through targeted proposals, to create a USGS Personal Safety resource that can be consulted by all staff, particularly laboratory and field team leaders and supervisors.

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Pre-departure checklist of discussions with team

We suggest that science centers create a document that all field group employees read, discuss and sign prior to field work that covers the following topics:

- a) Confirm that one or more members of the field team are equipped with the necessary skills to handle situations that threaten the physical or psychological safety of team members (e.g., bystander intervention, unconscious bias, conflict resolution training.)
- b) Ask each team member individually if they have any safety concerns regarding field operations, field area, lodging, distance to closest medical provider in the planning stages of fieldwork. Even after education, supervisors that do not share the same identity as their researchers will be unaware of all potential risk to researchers. If researchers bring up potential or experienced risk, validate their experiences and assist in modifying the project so that they can safely continue conducting research.
- c) Describe the various tasks that need to take place during field work and discuss employee's interests, comfort levels with different roles, and provide opportunities to participate in different roles to all employees whenever possible. Comfort levels doing a particular task can change with time, location, with different interactions and experiences; providing opportunities to switch "roles" in the field could help.
- d) Are there members of the team who may be at-risk based on visible signs of race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression (e.g., femme-identifying, transgender, non-binary), and/or religion (e.g., Muslim, Jewish, Sikh)?
- e) Make sure each team member is asked if they have dietary restrictions/preferences (allergies, vegan, lactose intolerance, kosher, gluten-free, diabetic, observation of religious customs, etc.)—make a plan for reasonable accommodations whether through restaurant selections, cooking, or shared vehicle availability to eat at different places if needed.
- f) Each team member is given information about bathroom availability/situation, especially for remote locations and small boat work (i.e., if there is no traditional bathroom, make sure team members are aware of how they are going to handle the logistics of using the bathroom, how to deal with personal hygiene considerations, privacy concerns, etc.). Encourage all staff to be sensitive/understanding to the personal hygiene needs of others and work on comfort in talking about potential hygiene issues and plans while in the field (trowel, boat bucket, in the woods, access to porta-potty, trash, etc.). Make employees aware of shower access (shared, private, handicap accessible).
- g) Introduce yourself to the neighbors surrounding the field property, or leave a short note informing neighbors about research being conducted at nearby locations and who will be conducting the research. It is advisable to also include contact information, preferably information that clearly demonstrates affiliation with the research institution to provide additional credibility.
- h) Identify people on the team that can be a resource for reporting issues in the field (e.g., have had some conflict resolution training). Having these skills are just as important as technical skills.
- i) Make it clear that mental health (and preservation of it) is equally important to physical safety (e.g., Psychological Safety).
- j) Ensures multiple forms of communication will be available in a common space, are available to all team members, and that all employees are trained to use any devices (e.g., satellite phone).

Documenting incidents in the field

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- a) Fill out form called: “Accidents and Incidents”
 - a) Report incidents that occur with USGS employees and incidents with external parties (e.g., public, vessel crew, non-USGS scientists and collaborators)
 - b) Report to regional safety officers for tracking
 - c) Explore the idea of having a designated person in the USGS science center to field complaints and concerns about harassment in the field. It may be advantageous to have that designated person be in a non-supervisory role so that individuals have the option of going to that person for advice without formal reporting requirements.

References Cited

Demery, A.J. C. and Pipkin, M.A. (2021) Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions, *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 5, 5–9 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-01328-5>

Disclaimer: Any opinions or recommendations are those of the URGE pod members only and do not necessarily represent the view of the USGS or the United States Government. Deliverables and any recommendations therein will be presented to USGS leadership for consideration.

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