



WCU Fieldwork Safety and Management Guidelines

West Chester University of Pennsylvania ("WCU" or the "University") is committed to providing opportunities for faculty, staff and students to perform fieldwork, both in courses and for research, and ensuring the work is done following best practices for health and safety. Without adequate preparation, field activities can expose participants to potentially significant risks to their health or safety. Additionally, failure to prepare may expose the faculty, staff, or the University to civil or criminal liability.

The intent of this guidance is to minimize the health, safety, and legal risks associated with fieldwork by recommending a risk assessment prior to fieldwork activities and by clearly defining responsibilities of those involved in planning and carrying out fieldwork activities.

There is no research or educational objective that justifies taking avoidable risks with the health and safety of yourself or others. All individuals performing fieldwork on behalf of the University (or taking courses in the field) are responsible for ensuring they work in a safe, conscientious, and lawful manner and shall follow this guidance at all times.

Definitions:

1. "Fieldwork" refers to practical work conducted by a student or researcher off campus, rather than in a classroom or laboratory.
2. "Fieldwork" consists of activities that are:
 - a. Authorized by WCU
 - b. Conducted for the purpose of study, research or training
 - c. Undertaken by faculty, staff, students, and authorized volunteers
 - d. Conducted off campus where planning for risks and for medical emergencies is essential
3. "Fieldwork" does not include:
 - a. Work conducted on WCU's main campus or satellite locations
 - b. Work in the field supervised by faculty as part of a course requirement
 - c. Supervised study or work placements at the campus, buildings, or leased offices of other institutions



- d. Travel for conferences, seminars, meetings or visits to other institutions
- e. ROTC training

This guidance does not apply to field-based research or study that is supervised by another institution or organization.

Relevant Offices at WCU:

[Office of Research and Sponsored Programs](#)

All Colleges with faculty, staff and students who participate in Field Work

NOTE: All fieldwork that is taking place, regardless of funding status requires Principal Investigators (or PIs) to verify, in writing, permission to conduct fieldwork on private or public property **prior to the start** of the research. The signed document shall stay in your possession as the PI.

Responsibilities:

Each Faculty Member or Principal Investigator conducting fieldwork:

- Is responsible for complying with safety plans and all federal, state, local and sponsor regulations.
- must be familiar with this Field Safety Guidance and develop a Safety Plan for fieldwork activities that identifies likely hazards associated with the activity or physical environment. The safety plan must include a plan for communication in case of emergency. The Safety Plan shall be shared with the Department Chairperson and kept on file. A fieldwork safety plan template is available [here](#).
- Ensure that all PIs, students, and staff working on the project complete training on the ethical and responsible conduct of research (RCR).
- Ensure compliance with appropriate regulatory requirements where program involves human subjects (IRB), use of animals (IACUC), biohazards, workplace health and safety requirements. All faculty, staff and students working on projects with IRB or IACUC must have appropriate CITI training.



- Ensure that all team members are informed about the potential risks and controls outlined in the Safety Plan.
- Ensure implementation of every aspect of the Safety Plan.
- Comply with all applicable federal and state statutes and regulations and local ordinances; any correspondence and instructions that may be provided by the Sponsor.
- Complete training on the ethical and responsible conduct of research (RCR) prior to any research being conducted.
- Complete CITI training for the ethical treatment of human or animal subjects when applicable prior to participating in any research.

For Fieldwork that is funded, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs should:

- Ensure that the requirements for a safety plan are reviewed and acknowledged by the PI and a Grants Development Specialist during the post award meeting.

For Fieldwork that is not funded, a Department Chair with faculty or students participating in fieldwork activities should:

- Ensure that each group has considered the health and safety hazards associated with these activities and developed a safety plan that adequately addresses those hazards.

Additional employees and students participating in fieldwork activities shall:

- Review the safety plan and become familiar with the risks identified and the relevant control strategies and communicate all medical restrictions to the PI.
- Follow guidance from the PI for minimizing risks.
- Notify the PI of any newly identified hazards.
- Report all incidents to the PI.
- Complete training on the ethical and responsible conduct of research (RCR) prior to any research being conducted.
- Complete CITI training for the ethical treatment of human or animal subjects when applicable prior to participating in any research.

PROCEDURE:



One of the most important phases of successful fieldwork experience is planning and preparation. The following steps should be completed before departing for any field activity.

A Safety Plan for fieldwork activities shall be completed by the PI or Lead Instructor. A fieldwork safety plan template is available [here](#).

Safety Provisions

Assemble safety provisions and check everything before you leave, including weather. Safety provisions for each trip may include items for the Field Team as well as gear for each participant.

International Travel

If your fieldwork involves traveling outside the country, you should begin planning early and consider your timing. Visit the US Department of State website to learn about any requirements for passport validity, visas, or vaccinations. Acquaint yourself with potential hazards including plants, animals, terrain and weather conditions. For additional information on International Travel see [Global Engagement Office](#)

The PI or Lead Instructor should submit an International Travel Approval request.

Working Alone

Fieldwork should be performed in teams of at least 2 people. Working alone in the field is strongly discouraged, especially in remote or hazardous locations, and should be avoided if possible.

TRAINING

Site-Specific Training

Initial training specific to the fieldwork site shall be provided by the PI and shall include a review of all sections of the safety plan. Refresher training shall be required whenever a new hazard is expected and for any new fieldwork location.

First Aid Training



At least one member of each field team shall be trained in First Aid and CPR. When fieldwork is to be conducted in an especially remote location, training in Wilderness First Aid should be considered.

Specialized Training

For activities such as SCUBA diving or piloting a boat, up to date certification from a commonly recognized authority, a license from the applicable governing body, and/or completion of an appropriate refresher course should be required.