



**Western**  
UNIVERSITY · CANADA

## **Department of Geography Fieldwork Safety Policy**

Revised: 2014

Supersedes: 2007

**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**  
**FIELDWORK SAFETY POLICY**

***Introduction:***

This policy has been prepared following discussions with physical and human geography faculty regarding the lack of a university fieldwork policy and unclear supervisor responsibilities during research and/or teaching-related field activities.

The Department of Geography recognizes that the research and scholarly activities of its faculty, staff and students may involve fieldwork, which may introduce inherent special risks and hazards. The Fieldwork Safety Policy applies to all members of the Department of Geography engaged in fieldwork, and is designed to assist in the prevention of work-related injuries and ensure that emergency plans are both coordinated and communicated.

***Definitions:***

**Fieldwork**

Fieldwork is any activity conducted for the purpose of research or teaching authorized by the University which is conducted by faculty, staff, graduate or undergraduate students or authorized volunteers at any off-campus location.

**Remote Fieldwork**

Remote fieldwork is fieldwork conducted at any location where it would be difficult to summon help and/or where emergency assistance would be an hour or more away without a vehicle.

**Supervisor**

The supervisor is the person in charge of the research, teaching or working arrangements. If the supervisor does not participate in the fieldwork, the responsibilities for the conduct and supervision of participants may be delegated to a team leader.

**Team Leader**

The team leader is the person in charge of a fieldwork team. This is most commonly the supervisor; however, in the absence of the supervisor, it may be another team member who is designated by the supervisor to take on the supervisor's responsibilities.

***Policy:***

The Fieldwork Safety Policy requires all participants of fieldwork to adhere to the following:

- Individuals participating in fieldwork must sign an Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk Form (see Section 1).
- Individuals participating in fieldwork must be familiar with a Safety Plan in case an accident or injury occurs (see Section 2) (not required for class field trips).
- All fieldwork must be conducted in such a way that potential risks are minimized.
- It is not advisable for any person to complete fieldwork alone. Where it is appropriate for an individual to work alone, that individual must let someone know their location.

- Any participant conducting fieldwork has the right to refuse what they consider unsafe work.
- In remote fieldwork locations, at least one supervisor must have up-to-date first aid training and must ensure there are sufficient first aid supplies. First aid kits are available from Erika Hill, the Laboratory Supervisor.

### **Section 1: Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk Form**

The Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk Form in Appendix 1 must be completed by all individuals participating in fieldwork. This includes class field trips, field camps (343Y), undergraduate and graduate fieldwork, and/or work study fieldwork. This form is to be signed and dated prior to departure. Completed forms are to be given to the Geography main office staff, prior to departure.

### **Section 2: Safety Plan**

The Safety Plan in Appendix 2 must be completed by the fieldwork supervisor and participants prior to departure. More complicated and potentially hazardous fieldwork will require more extensive safety plans. Completed forms are to be given to the Geography main office staff, prior to departure.

Class field trips are an exception and do not require a Safety Plan, however, emergency plans should be coordinated and communicated to fieldwork participants.

The Safety Plan must include;

- Participant's name, contact information and emergency contacts
- Date of departure and date of return
- Location of fieldwork, nearest community, emergency services and contacts
- Nature of fieldwork to be undertaken and possible hazards
- Emergency procedures so all participants are aware of a plan of action that is to be followed in the event of an accident
- Travel insurance requirements
- Immunization requirements
- Inspection of equipment to be used
- Confirmation that all necessary personal protective equipment is readily available (e.g. safety glasses, hard hats)
- Adequate training (e.g. navigation and map reading; what to do in case of confrontation with bears, dangerous snake etc.; the procedure to follow if a student is injured or lost)

Other relevant information supervisors may wish to provide participants may include:

- Itinerary
- Accommodations
- Transport arrangements
- Catering arrangements
- Clothing requirements

- Terrain topography
- Expected weather conditions

***Responsibilities:***

**Supervisors**

- Ensure that all participants have signed an Acknowledgment and Assumption of Risk Form prior to departure
- Formulate a Safety Plan and discuss it with fieldwork participants (not required for class field trips)
- Provide adequate training to fieldwork participants
- In remote fieldwork locations, at least one supervisor must have up-to-date first aid training and must ensure there are sufficient first aid supplies. First aid kits are available from Erika Hill, the Laboratory Supervisor
- In the unfortunate case that an accident does occur, the supervisor must complete an Accident/Incident Report Form. This form must be submitted to Occupational Health and Safety, the Department Chair, as well as the injured student

**Participants**

- Complete an Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk Form prior to departure
- Provide emergency contact information and relevant medical information
- Students conducting fieldwork must formulate a Safety Plan and submit it to their supervisor
- Follow all applicable safety rules and directions as outlined by the supervisor
- Report any accident, injury, illness or near miss event associated with fieldwork to the supervisor

Personal safety must be a personal responsibility. Complacency, inattention, lack of preparation and/or training will all increase risks to health and safety. Although supervisors will take every reasonable precaution concerning the safety of participants, the potential hazards make it imperative that everyone behaves responsibly in order to reduce the risk of accidents. Ultimately each individual must act in a reasonable manner in order to ensure their safety and the safety of others.

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