

Health and Safety Procedure - Fieldwork Safety

Section 1 - Background and Purpose

(1) La Trobe University undertakes significant levels of fieldwork as part of teaching, learning, research and in support of campus operations such as the Wildlife Sanctuary.

(2) Fieldwork is a type of off-campus activity that occurs outside the normal University environment. Fieldwork in this context is experiential activity where staff and/or students gather data, samples and specimens. Examples include field excursions, field camps, archaeological digs and wreck research, scuba diving, water research, agricultural activities, surveying, and identifying and collecting geological or biological specimens. This listing is not exhaustive.

(3) Fieldwork can range from simple local excursions to complex international expeditions that can expose participants to hazards not normally experienced on or off campus. Further, fieldwork is often undertaken in places that are isolated from emergency services with potentially delayed response times.

(4) The purpose of this Procedure is to address the hazards and the heightened risk associated with these types of activities. Low risk off-campus activity such as learning or researching at another organisation (which has its own systems and processes) is exempt from this procedure.

(5) This Procedure outlines a risk management approach to planning and executing fieldwork with the intent of ensuing common standards and practices, including suitable communication and emergency procedures to manage the risk.

Section 2 - Scope

(6) This Procedure applies to all fieldwork managed by La Trobe University - urban, remote, local, regional and international.

Section 3 - Policy Statement

(7) Refer to the University [Health and Safety Policy](#) and the [Travel Management Policy](#).

Section 4 - Procedures

Part A - Responsibilities

Managers and Leaders

(8) Managers and Leaders are responsible for:

- a. Ensuring that all fieldwork is planned, authorised and safely conducted

- b. Ensuring processes are in place to respond to any incident
- c. Managing the review after an incident to capture the lessons learnt
- d. Enabling fieldwork reviews to occur periodically for continuous improvement

Health and Safety Team

(9) The Health and Safety Team are responsible for:

- a. Providing oversight and monitoring this Procedure
- b. Providing advice on hazards and risks to consider
- c. Providing advice on risk control measures
- d. Supporting incident response, investigation and sharing the lessons learnt across the organisation

Fieldwork Coordinator Role

(10) The Fieldwork Coordinator is responsible for:

- a. Planning and documenting the proposed fieldwork, utilising risk assessment
- b. Ensuring the authority to proceed is obtained
- c. Providing a fieldwork plan that includes communication to the school and to participants

All Staff, Students and Volunteers

(11) All Staff, Students and Volunteers are responsible for:

- a. Following the fieldwork and communication plan
- b. Ensuring the [Code of Conduct](#) is adhered to during the fieldwork
- c. Stopping the work or activity if there is immediate or perceived risk to health and safety
- d. Reporting all hazards and incidents

Part B - Categories of Fieldwork

(12) Fieldwork will vary widely, presenting differing levels of hazard and risk with consideration to the type of activity undertaken and whether the location is urban, rural, regional or international. The following groupings are indicative categories to assist aligning the level of risk assessment, communication and emergency planning that is required:

Urban Fieldwork

(13) Any approved practical work carried out by staff, students or volunteers for the purpose of teaching and/or research in an urban setting such as cities and regional residential and commercial areas where good levels of emergency support is typically 10-15 minutes away. Examples include urban surveys, visiting parkways, riparian nature reserves and is inclusive of international locations with good infrastructure.

Rural Fieldwork

(14) Any approved practical work carried out by staff, students or volunteers for the purpose of teaching and/or research in places that are outside urban areas and where emergency support is typically 30-45 minutes away. Examples include nature conservation areas and international locations with good infrastructure.

Remote Fieldwork

(15) Any approved practical work carried out by staff, students or volunteers for the purpose of teaching and/or

research in places that typically experience intermittent or poor communication reception and emergency support is 60 minutes or more away or not available. Examples include areas with very little traffic, on waterways or where hills, dense vegetation or other topographical features will make it difficult to obtain help and also includes international locations with poor or absent infrastructure.

(16) Each school will develop risk assessments and processes to address the differing types of fieldwork and ensure simple excursions cover basic requirements whilst complex field expeditions are deeply considered and planned for.

Part C - Fieldwork Planning

(17) Fieldwork planning will be undertaken by the Fieldwork Coordinator and follow a risk approach and considers the proposed activity and location to identify the hazards, assess the risk and plan the controls to reduce risk to as low as reasonably practicable.

(18) Planning will be undertaken by either:

- a. Completing the fieldwork planning template that is available in the schools and colleges; or
- b. Creating a document that addresses the following parameters by identifying the hazards, assessing the risks and planning the controls for risk reduction:
 - i. People risk (behavioural, fitness, health conditions, competency /training, supervision)
 - ii. Environment risk (Weather extremes, flora, fauna, security, disease, communication)
 - iii. Travel risk (vehicles, fatigue, lone traveller)
 - iv. Activity risk (understand the risk associated with the specific activity)
 - v. Infrastructure & equipment (accommodation, resources, supplies, manual handling)
 - vi. Emergency Management/supplies (distance to medical facilities, first aid supplies, incident response)

(19) Each field trip plan will incorporate common practices and standards, including suitable communication and emergency procedures that are drawn and refined from operational experience to incorporate continuous improvement.

Part D - Safe Driving

(20) The Fieldwork Coordinator will ensure that that the requirements specified in the Safe Driving Procedure are integrated with the fieldwork plan.

Part E - Overseas Travel

(21) All staff and students travelling overseas will follow the safety and security requirements specified in the [Travel Management Policy](#).

Part F - Communication

(22) The Fieldwork Coordinator will establish the methods and timing of communication by considering:

- a. Frequency of contact with supervisor / school
- b. Method of contact
- c. Equipment required for communication in remote locations i.e. via satellite phones, spot devices
- d. Communication with any governing body i.e. Parks Victoria
- e. Roll calls for fieldwork parties

(23) The Fieldwork Coordinator will document the communication equipment and methods in the fieldwork plan.

Part G - Working Alone

(24) When fieldwork is conducted alone in rural or remote locations, a communication plan that involves regular contact will be exercised.

Part H - Code of Conduct

(25) All participants are expected to adhere to the University [Code of Conduct](#) – staff or student and comply with all reasonable directions from the Fieldwork Coordinator or leader. This expectation extends to volunteers.

Part I - First Aid

(26) The requirement for First Aid kits will be risk assessed and kits will be supplied to address the hazards and risks involved for the type and duration of the activity.

Part J - Emergency and Incident Management

(27) For rural or remote fieldwork, the Fieldwork Coordinator will include an emergency and incident management plan within the fieldtrip plan and include:

- a. Emergency Services contact details e.g. fire, ambulance, police
- b. Address and contact number of closest medical facilities
- c. Local plan for communication during any critical incident
- d. Next of kin details for all participants

(28) In the event of an incident during any fieldwork, the Fieldwork Coordinator or nominated delegate will:

- a. Contact emergency services where required, or
- b. Seek medical assistance where required
- c. Report the incident as soon as practical (ideally within 24 hours) to their Supervisor and the HSE team through the [Incident and Hazard Reporting](#) system that is located on the University Intranet.

Part K - Disabilities and Medical Restrictions

(29) The Fieldwork Coordinator will discuss with participants whether there are disabilities and medical restrictions that may be impacted by the fieldwork or increase the risk of an incident / affect the response capacity and document any disclosed disability or medical restriction in the fieldwork plan. Fieldwork participants are responsible for the supply, safe use and storage of their medications.

Part L - Review and Continuous Improvement

(30) A review of each fieldtrip will be undertaken as an opportunity for continuous improvement and can be formal or informal.

(31) A formal review utilising the Health & Safety incident investigation processes will be required when:

- a. A significant incident or near-miss occurs
- b. Additional in-situ risk assessments were required during the fieldtrip
- c. There was a significant change to plans or itineraries that created unforeseen risks/increased risks

(32) Whilst actions following investigation during the fieldwork normally focus on immediate cause and effect and continuity issues, reviews should also focus on potential shortcomings in planning, processes and procedures, and in management of the fieldwork.

Section 5 - Definitions

(33) For the purpose of this Procedure:

- a. Fieldwork: is any data gathering or experiential activity carried out by staff or students for the purposes of teaching, research or operations while representing La Trobe University at an off-campus location. Examples include field excursions, field camps, archaeological digs and wreck research, scuba diving, water research, agricultural activities, surveying, and identifying and collecting geological or biological specimens.
- b. Fieldwork Coordinator: is the role assumed to plan and manage the fieldwork operation for its duration by a member of the fieldwork team.
- c. Hazard: is anything with the potential to cause harm. Potential hazards can be identified on the basis of previous experience or from the anticipation of problems that can be reasonably associated with the activity.
- d. Off-campus work: is work undertaken away from the person's normal work environment and not on-campus. Fieldwork is a type of off-campus work.
- e. Risk control: is the allocation of resources or methods to eliminate or to minimise, as far as is reasonably practicable, the risk to safety or health from a hazard.
- f. Remote Areas: are places that typically experience intermittent or poor communication reception and emergency support is 60 minutes or more away or not available.
- g. Rural Areas: are locations outside urban areas and where emergency support is typically 30-45 minutes away.
- h. Urban Areas: are locations such as cities and regional residential or commercial areas where good levels of emergency support is typically 10-15 minutes away.
- i. Volunteer: is a member of the field party who has freely offered to take part but not directly associated with the teaching or the research. A volunteer is managed by the Fieldwork Coordinator and is required to comply with this procedure. A written agreement should exist between the University and a volunteer.

Status and Details

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