

Health and Safety Procedure - Fieldwork Safety

Section 1 - Key Information

Policy Type and Approval Body	Administrative – Vice-Chancellor
Accountable Executive – Policy	Chief Operating Officer
Responsible Manager – Policy	Senior Manager, Health and Safety
Review Date	16 March 2026

Section 2 - Purpose

(1) This procedure documents how to comply with the [Health and Safety Policy](#) with regard to addressing the hazards and the heightened risk associated with fieldwork.

Section 3 - Scope

(2) This Procedure applies to:

- a. All staff, students, volunteers who participate in fieldwork.
- b. Fieldwork that occurs outside the normal University environment. Fieldwork includes activities where staff and/or students gather data, samples and specimens. This includes field excursions, field camps, archaeological digs, wreck research, scuba diving, water research, agricultural activities, surveying, and collecting geological or biological specimens. Fieldwork is often undertaken in places that are isolated from emergency services with potentially delayed response times.

(3) This Procedure does not apply to:

- a. low risk off-campus activity not in a remote location and doesn't have significant safety hazards such as manual handling, use of chemicals, use of machinery, work at height, excavation, radiation, working near water bodies, fauna risks. For these activities follow the university's [Travel Management Policy](#) , and [Health and Safety Procedure - Safe Driving](#) .

Section 4 - Key Decisions

Key decisions	Role
Refer to the detailed Responsibilities outlined in Part A below	

Section 5 - Policy Statement

(4) This procedure forms part of the [Health and Safety Policy](#) suite which governs its application.

Section 6 - Procedures

(5) The University is committed to ensuring fieldwork is conducted safely by using a process of identifying likely safety hazards and implementing adequate risk controls.

(6) Each school will plan to manage the safety hazards of differing types of fieldwork. This ranges from basic safety requirements for simple excursions, to extensive safety requirements for complex field expeditions.

Part A - Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Managers and Leaders	Ensuring that all fieldwork is planned, authorised and safely conducted Ensuring processes are in place to respond to any incident Managing the review after an incident to capture the lessons learnt Enabling fieldwork reviews to occur periodically for continuous improvement
Health and Safety Team	Providing oversight and monitoring of this Procedure Providing advice on hazards, risks and risk control measures Supporting incident response, investigation and sharing lessons learnt across the organisation
Fieldwork Coordinator	Completing a documented risk assessment (or safety manual) detailing how the proposed fieldwork will be conducted safely Ensuring the documented authority to proceed is obtained Providing a Fieldwork Trip Plan Maintaining the confidentiality of all personal or sensitive information of fieldwork participants
Staff, Students and Volunteers	Following the fieldwork and communication plan Ensuring the University Code of Conduct is adhered to during the fieldwork Stopping the work or activity if there is immediate or perceived risk to health and safety Reporting all hazards and incidents

Part B - Fieldwork Planning

(7) Planning will be undertaken by either:

- a. Completing a fieldwork risk assessment, (templates are available on the intranet and in the schools), OR creating a fieldwork safety manual. This document should detail the hazards and required control measures for the project and consider:
 - 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, machinery, resources, supplies, manual handling)
 - vi. Emergency Management/supplies (distance to medical facilities, first aid supplies, incident response)

(8) The Fieldwork Coordinator is responsible for preparing a Fieldwork Trip Plan that includes:

- a. Call in plan

- b. Any required permits and approvals
- c. Participant and next of kin contact details
- d. Participant medical or disability information
- e. Itinerary
- f. Vehicle details
- g. Nearby medical and hospital facilities

Part C - Supervision of Undergraduate Trips

(9) Supervision should be based on the risks of the activities:

- a. Higher risk activities should have a higher level of supervision. (eg Work in a remote location involving use of machinery, work at height, excavation, radiation, working near water bodies, fauna risks etc). Consider a ratio similar to 1 staff member or volunteer for every 10 undergraduate students.
- b. Lower risk activities (eg not in a remote location and doesn't have significant safety hazards), should have a lower level of supervision.

Part D - Safe Driving

(10) The Fieldwork Coordinator will ensure that that the requirements specified in the [Health and Safety Procedure - Safe Driving](#) Procedure are integrated with the fieldwork plan.

Part E - Use of Hazardous Machinery

(11) The Fieldwork Coordinator will ensure the following occurs when the use of hazardous machinery is proposed:

- a. operator manual/information is available
- b. a documented risk assessment is conducted on the use of the machinery
- c. a documented safe operating procedure is developed

(12) All persons who will use the machinery will receive training on the use of machinery and need to be assessed as competent. A record of this training and competency assessment must be kept.

Part F - Overseas Travel

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

Part G - Communication

(14) 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. Traditional Owners, Parks Victoria
- e. roll calls for fieldwork parties

(15) The Fieldwork Coordinator will document the communication equipment and methods in the trip plan.

Part H - Working Alone

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

Part I - Working with Partner Organisations

(17) When fieldwork is conducted with one or more partner organisations, safety arrangements will be facilitated by effective communication and coordination between La Trobe University and the Partner organisation(s); and

(18) If there is inconsistency between La Trobe's safety arrangements and those of the partner organisation(s), La Trobe staff should follow the process that provides a higher level of safety, while also following La Trobe processes where possible.

Part J - Unexpected and Non-Standard Situations

(19) When fieldwork parties encounter unexpected or non standard situations, they must stop and take adequate time to assess the situation. This may involve:

- a. doing a thorough inspection of the area
- b. discussion with field party members and other relevant persons
- c. contacting the University for further advice where required
- d. completing an in-situ risk assessment, whether documented or informal
- e. developing and implementing effective control measures to manage the safety risks before recommencing work

(20) Fieldworkers are fully empowered and instructed by the University to cease fieldwork where safety risks cannot be managed.

Part K - Code of Conduct

(21) All fieldwork participants are expected to act safely and professionally and, adhere to the University [Code of Conduct](#). Participants must comply with all reasonable directions from the Fieldwork Coordinator or leader. This expectation extends to volunteers.

Part L - First Aid

(22) 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 M - Emergency and Incident Management

(23) For rural or remote fieldwork, the Fieldwork Coordinator will include an emergency and incident management plan within the field trip 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

(24) In the event of an incident during any fieldwork, the Fieldwork Coordinator or nominee will:

- a. contact emergency services where required
- b. seek medical assistance where required
- c. report the incident as soon as practical (ideally within 24 hours) to their Supervisor and the Health and Safety team through the Incident and Hazard Reporting system on the University Intranet.

Part N - Disabilities, Medical Restrictions, Allergies and Medications

(25) The Fieldwork Coordinator will discuss with participants if there are disabilities, medical restrictions or allergies that may be impacted by the fieldwork, increase the risk of an incident or affect the party's capacity to respond to an urgent or non-standard situation. Details should be documented in the trip plan.

(26) Fieldwork participants are responsible for the supply, safe use and storage of their medications.

Part O - Review and Continuous Improvement

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

(28) 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 field trip
- c. there was a significant change to plans or itineraries that created unforeseen risks/increased risks

(29) The investigation should focus on a wide range of potential contributing factors at the planning, preparation and conducting stages of the fieldwork.

Section 7 - Definitions

(30) 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 the 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.
- 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.

Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

(31) This Policy is made under the [La Trobe University Act 2009](#).

(32) Associated information includes:

- a. [Health and Safety \(intranet\)](#)

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	16th March 2023
Review Date	16th March 2026
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	16th March 2023
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
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