Title/Subject: FIELD WORK SAFETY POLICY

Applies to: ☒Faculty ☒Staff ☒Students ☒Student Employees ☐Visitors ☐Contractors

Effective Date of This Revision: November 1, 2020

Policy Owner: Office of Laboratory and Field Safety (OLFS)

Purpose

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. The intent of this policy is to minimize health and safety risks associated with fieldwork by requiring 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 field work on behalf of the university (or taking courses in the field) are responsible for ensuring they work in a safe and conscientious manner and follow this policy at all times. Failure to follow these policies and procedures may make you individually liable in the case of accident or injury.

Definitions

1. "Fieldwork" refers to practical work conducted by a student or researcher in the natural environment, rather than in a classroom, or laboratory.

2. "Fieldwork" consists of activities that are:

    - Authorized by Central Michigan University (CMU);
    - Conducted for the purpose of study, research, or teaching;
    - Undertaken by faculty, staff, students, and authorized volunteers;
    - Conducted in remote locations where planning for risks in the natural environment and for medical emergencies is essential.

3. "Fieldwork" **does** include study, research, or teaching activities conducted in Veit's Woods and in the wooded and natural areas surrounding the lodge at Neithercut Woodland.

4. "Fieldwork" **does not** include:

    - Work conducted on CMU's main campus, the campus of CMU's Biological Station, or other buildings owned or leased by CMU;
    - Supervised study or work placements at the campus, buildings, or leased offices of other institutions;
    - Travel for conferences, seminars, meetings, or visits to other institutions;
    - Army ROTC training.

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

Policy

Relevant Offices at CMU

Risk Management/Environmental Health & Safety

Office of Laboratory and Field Safety

Responsibilities

1. Department Chairs or Directors with faculty, staff, or students participating in fieldwork activities shall:
    - 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.
    - Review and approve all Safety Plans for fieldwork.

2. Each Lead Instructor or Principal Investigator (PI) conducting fieldwork shall:
    - Review the Field Safety Policy and submit the **form** documenting the review annually.
    - 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 communications in case of emergency.
    - Submit the Proposed Educational Trip form if relevant.
    - Provide relevant information about hazards and prevention of exposure to hazards.
    - Ensure participants in activities such as SCUBA diving, using heavy equipment, piloting a boat or driving a vehicle are licensed or certified as appropriate.
    - Provide relevant information about appropriate emergency response to injuries or illnesses, including location of medical care facilities nearest to the field site.
    - Designate a Field Team Leader for each excursion who will carry out the responsibilities listed in 3, below.
    - Set up a system for keeping track of personnel who will be in the field so that someone on campus (in the lab or department) knows where personnel will be, how to contact them, and when they expect to be back.
    - If an incident occurs, the Lead Instructor or PI will:
        - Fill out an initial accidental personal injury report form;
        - Investigate the incident to determine its cause;
        - Where possible, incorporate preventive measures into the safety plan.
    - Notify the department of incidents. If relevant, also notify Worker's Compensation (employee injury) and/or Risk Management/Environmental Health & Safety (RMEHS).

3. The Field Team Leader shall:
    - Review this Field Policy and submit the **form** documenting the review annually.
    - Ensure all team members are informed about the potential risks and controls outlined in the Safety Plan.
    - Ensure implementation of controls (e.g., personal protective equipment, medical precautions).
    - Ensure that at least one team member is certified in first aid and CPR, and ensure that a first aid kit is available.
    - Ensure adequate provisions for food, shelter, water, communication, and transportation.
    - Provide planned itinerary specifying dates and times you expect to leave for and return from the field, as required by the PI or Lead Instructor.
    - Conduct ongoing risk assessments and report new hazards to the Lead Instructor or PI.
    - Resolve safety concerns arising in the field.
    - Maintain regular contact with PI or department.
    - Inform PI or department of all incidents (e.g., injuries, illnesses, or near-misses).

4. Employees and students participating in fieldwork activities shall:

- Submit a health information form as specified in the field safety plan (to be kept confidential unless needed) and communicate all medical restrictions to the Lead Investigator or Principal Investigator and the Field Team Leader before participating in field work activities. Review the safety plan and become familiar with the risks identified and relevant control strategies.
- Follow guidance from the PI, Lead Instructor, and Field Team Leader for minimizing risks.
- Notify the Field Team Leader, PI, or Lead Instructor of any newly identified hazard.
- Report all incidents to the Field Team Leader, PI, or Lead Instructor.

5. Authorized volunteers and any non-CMU participants in fieldwork activities shall have the same responsibilities as employees and students (noted above) and shall sign a Waiver form.

6. The Office of Laboratory and Field Safety shall:
   - Provide guidance and support to employees developing safety plans for fieldwork.
   - Review and approve fieldwork safety plans when required by granting or certification organizations.
   - Refer to RMEHS for consultation as needed on issues such as insurance and participation agreements for volunteers/non-CMU participants.

Procedure

Departments with employees or students participating in fieldwork activities as defined in this policy shall develop a review process to ensure that each group has met requirements of this policy and any additional departmental and/or CMU requirements. The Department will ensure that staff or students participating in fieldwork are familiar with the departmental review process.

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

Safety Plan

A **Safety Plan** for fieldwork activities will be developed by the PI or Lead Instructor. CMU documents on fieldwork hazards, along with other related policies, should be consulted for guidance; these are available on the Office of Laboratory and Field Safety website. The Safety Plan will include:

- Names and contact information for the PI or Lead Instructor and the Field Team Leader.
- Travel schedule (complete the **Land-Based Travel Itinerary** form or **Water-Based Travel Itinerary** form and attach to the Safety Plan).
- Location of the field work and a brief description of the research or teaching activity.
- A list of all members of the team, including their relationship to CMU (student, employee, volunteer).
- Emergency contact persons at the university and in the field.
- Emergency procedures, including identification of team members trained in first aid and contact information for local emergency medical care.
- Unusual physical demands (such as those associated with high altitude, climbing, diving).
- A risk assessment of safety and health hazards associated with the activity or physical environment (such as weather, wildlife, plants, diseases, radiation, tools/equipment/chemicals to be used, heights/steep terrain, or unusual methods of travel). The risk assessment must include strategies for controlling risk.
- Information on necessary or recommended travel immunizations or prophylaxis.

Safety Provisions

Assemble safety provisions and check everything before you lease. Safety provisions for each trip may include items for the Field Team as well as gear for each participant; see **Field Safety Gear and Provisions** checklist.

International Travel

If your work involves traveling outside the country you should begin planning early. Visit the U.S. 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 (see documents on the Office of Laboratory and Field Safety website for information).

The PI or Lead Instructor should submit an International Travel Approval request and consult the Foreign Travel page on CMU's Risk Management website for information about insurance and liability while traveling internationally. If relevant, review CMU's International Programs policy on the Study Abroad website.

Working Alone

Fieldwork should be performed in teams of at least two people. Working alone in the field is strongly discouraged, especially in remote or hazardous locations, and should be avoided if possible. Employees are only authorized to work alone with prior approval from their supervisor based on a documented assessment of hazards, with adequate contingency and emergency communication plans. Approval will only be granted if the chances of injury are minimal.

Force Majeure Events

Fieldwork approval may be nullified or delayed by Force Majeure (i.e. unforeseeable circumstances such as pandemics, riots, war, hurricanes).

Training

Site-Specific Training

Initial training specific to the field work site will be provided by the Lead Instructor or Principal Investigator, and will include a review of all sections of the safety plan. Refresher training will be required whenever new hazards are expected, and for any new fieldwork location.

First Aid Training

At least one member of each field team should be trained in First Aid and CPR. MIOSHA requires first aid care be readily available to employees during all working hours. 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 appropriate refresher courses shall be required.

Documentation

All faculty and staff engaged in field work for course work or for research are required to complete the Field Safety Policy Documentation form and submit it to the Office of Laboratory and Field Safety (OLFS) and to their department chair or director.

First aid training should be documented by current Red Cross or American Heart Association certification cards.

Reference

Safety Guidelines for Fieldwork, Occupational and Environmental Safety Office, Duke University and Duke Medicine (Adapted from the *Safety Guidelines for Field Researchers*, Office of Environment, Health & Safety, University of California, Berkeley). Used with permission.

Central Michigan University reserves the right to make exceptions to modify or eliminate this policy and or its content. This document supersedes all previous policies, procedures or guidelines related to this subject.

Related Policies and Laws (Add Number & Name of Significantly Related Policy(ies))	
Appendices (Optional)	
Approval Authority	Robert O. Davies, President
History of Review	04/15/2018; 11/01/2020
Last Reviewed Date	1/20/2026
Anticipated Review Date	
Change/No Change	Webpage links
Keywords	Field Work; Field Trips; Field Research; Field Safety