

Introduction

Fieldwork is usually defined as any practical work carried out by staff or students for the purpose of teaching / research in places not under the control of the University, but where the University is responsible for the safety of staff, students or others exposed to their activities. Fieldwork includes such diverse activities as visits to factories, farms, dietary surveys, and consumer data collection.

Responsibilities

The Head of School has overall responsibility for the health and safety of all activities carried out by the School, including fieldwork. The academic supervisor in charge of the research area is responsible for the health and safety of those engaged in fieldwork and ensuring they receive necessary health and safety information and training. This responsibility may be delegated to a suitably experienced fieldwork coordinator. Fieldworkers, regardless of whether they are staff or students (undergraduate or postgraduate), are responsible for taking reasonable care of their own safety and adhering to any control measures required.

Hazards

Hazards associated with fieldwork activities that may be carried out in the School include:

- Exposure to animals, insects and vegetation which carry diseases or may release toxins.
- Hazards from portable tools or equipment used during fieldwork.
- Increased exposure to risks of everyday life and social interaction such as road accidents and seasonal infections.

Risks

A risk assessment must be carried out for all fieldwork activities. Assessments should consider the following:

- Experience and competency of fieldworkers.
- Training and supervision.
- Contingency planning (e.g., dealing with emergencies).
- They should reference any source information used to inform the risk assessment (e.g., ethics documents, SOPs).

As with all risk assessments, details of identified hazards and controls in place /required must be included, together with an indication of risk level (low, medium, high) (See *Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment* section of the safety statement). See the documents listed at the end of this section for information on identifying hazards and assessing risks for specific fieldwork situations.

The risk assessment must be signed off by the academic supervisor with overall responsibility for the work. All fieldworkers must read the assessment and sign to show they understand the hazards and the steps required to control the risks. Risk assessments should be reviewed as appropriate. Fieldwork covering an extended time period may require several reviews so that the assessment is up to date with any changes. For one-off fieldwork activities the assessment should be reviewed at the end of the fieldwork period if similar activities are planned for the future. Reviews should involve consultation with fieldworkers so that any observations made in the field can be considered.

Other hazards associated with the work must also be considered and appropriate risk assessments carried out. For example, a biological risk assessment may be required for biological sample collection or a manual handling risk assessment for equipment use.

Arrangements and controls

- All fieldwork activities should conform to the University *Fieldwork Safety Code of Practice*, issued by the Health and Safety Office.
- A written risk assessment must be carried out for all fieldwork activities.
- Safety guidelines specific to the nature of the fieldwork should be prepared. Generally, these should include:
 - Safety responsibilities of supervisors and fieldworkers.
 - Main hazards.
 - Details of controls required.
 - Emergency procedures.
 - Accident reporting.
- All safety advice, procedures and guidelines should be given to fieldworkers in written and oral form.
- Ensure that fieldworkers acknowledge receipt of written advice by signature.
- All incidents/accidents must be reported to the fieldworker supervisor (see *Accident and Dangerous Occurrence Reporting* section of the safety statement).

Sources of information

- Section 18.12 Fieldwork (UCC Safety Statement Work Manual Volume 2)
<https://www.ucc.ie/en/occupationalhealthandsafety/risk-safety-field/workmanual/appslinks/>
- University Fieldwork Safety Code of Practice
<http://www.ucc.ie/en/occupationalhealthandsafety/risk-safety-field/fieldwork/>
- Home Visits/ Face to Face Interviews Safety Guidelines for Staff/Students (UCD Insurance, Operational Risk and Compliance Office).
<http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Home%20Visits%20-%20Face%20To%20Face%20Interviews%20Safety%20Guidelines.pdf>
- A Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers (The Social Research Association)
http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/safety_code_of_practice.pdf
- HSE Guidelines for Lone Workers
http://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/Resources/hrppg/Guidelines_for_Lone_Working%202012.pdf

Revision history

Version	Comments	Date
1	Adapted from Health and Safety Office Safety Statement Work Manual Template Fieldwork document to reflect current school activities. Information resources added.	May 2017
2	General update.	May 2018