

## **FIELD SAFETY GUIDELINES**

Version 2 (Updated: 2 May 2022)

The goal of this document is to provide general safety guidelines for safely working in the field. Ultimately, the goal is to not only ensure physical safety, but also ensure that everyone working in the field feels comfortable doing so. These guidelines are intended to be applied broadly to various field situations, although they stem from our experiences working as a lab group in various places. This document is intended to be a living document, modified as frequently as necessary, to maximize safety, fun, and science in the field.

As a starting point, everyone should read this article:

**Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors, and institutions.**

Demery, A.J.C., Pipkin, M.A. *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 5, 5–9 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-01328-5>

This article provides a broad platform for thinking about, taking about, and implementing field safety. It also provides a lot of excellent resources.

**Field work can be a lot of fun (and hard work), but it also has plenty of risks.** Field work can be a lot of fun. For many, it is one of the best parts of being an ecologist. But it is only fun if you feel safe and comfortable in the field. Field work is already physically and emotionally challenging—adding in safety risks can make a field situation go from one of the most fun experiences in your life to one of the most stressful and uncomfortable situations you've ever been in. This document is intended to prepare all of us to avoid unsafe and uncomfortable situations.

**Let's talk about field safety.** First things first. If you have not worked in the field before, have a new project, are nervous or uncomfortable about something, let's talk about it. As a lab group, we will have general field safety conversations each year prior to the field season (as part of regularly scheduled lab meetings). One-on-one conversations will be had with new team members. The lab PI will initiate these conversations for new team members, but the point is that these conversations should be had, and you should never feel bad for wanting to talk about it (and of course, the lab PI is also happy to chat about it at any time).

**You should feel safe in the field and you should feel comfortable doing field work.** If you do not feel safe, bring this up to a field team member immediately (or if working alone, walkie talkie someone immediately). Once safely back from the situation, you should inform the lab PI so we can figure out how best to move forward.

**Prior to field work, consider potential risks.** Prior to field work, we should all consider what types of potential risks could occur in the field. These will depend on a variety of factors, including where the work is being conducted, who is conducting the field work, how many people, etc. But, in all situations, we need to consider the risks, whether that is an encounter with a large and dangerous wild animal, or a weird and creepy person roaming around. Once potential risks have been considered, they should be communicated with all field team members.

General risks: [*Encourage all lab members to provide input here.*]

RMBL-specific risks: insect stings and bites, wild animals, weird people, people with guns, people who don't believe in science, crazy people on the road, skeptical or angry forest service workers, getting lost, getting dehydrated, altitude sickness, getting hurt, sun burn, heat exhaustion, lightning strikes

**Make a contingency plan.** Upon considering risks, a contingency plan should be made to ensure a safe exit from the field. Such a plan and exit strategy may be very simple, but there is a big difference from having to think of an exit strategy in an unsafe situation for the first time versus having a simple plan in your head. Knowing that you should depart the field once you start to feel uncomfortable can make a big difference in your response time. Our general rule is: if you start to feel even the least bit uncomfortable, then it means you should take action.

**Make sure someone knows where you will be working and when you will be back.** When you are heading to the field, alone or with a team, you should always make sure that someone else who is not in the group is aware of where you are going, how long you will be gone, and when you will be back. You can leave a note in the lab, send an email to a lab mate, send a text to a friend—whatever works for you.

**Work with someone else.** Although this is not always possible, and although some people prefer to work alone, working with other people makes field work safer.

**Walkie Talkies.** Especially at RMBL, you should make sure that you, or someone in the field team, has a walkie talkie to communicate with other team members. Not only does this ensure you can communicate with others in case of an unsafe situation, it also brings with it some status. For example, lab members have noted that if a walkie talkie is visible on the field gear, it communicates to other people that you are official, and can communicate with others rapidly.

**Carry official documents.** Official documentation of your status as a researcher (e.g., student identification card, ID badge, faculty card) and your field work (a letter on official letter head)—however simple—should be carried in your field bag. The point is, in case anyone ever questions your status or what you are doing (a random person, the police, forest service worker), some sort of official documentation can clarify things very quickly. The lab PI has created a template on official letter head that can be easily modified each field season, in each field location, and for each person.

**Official gear and/or clothing.** Although not required, if you have a hat, shirt, pin, badge, or whatever, that has some sort of official insignia, these can be helpful ways to communicate that you are associated with an institution. Similar to carrying official documents, such clothing or gear can quickly change someone's perception of what you are doing.