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Guidance for Research-Related Field and Off-Campus Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Last updated: 4/13/2020

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this guidance is to facilitate research-related “field” activities consistent with State of Maine, University of Maine System (UMS) and University of Maine/University of Maine-Machias directives and guidelines to minimize employee, student, and community risks from COVID-19.

These guidelines apply to activities of the University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias. These guidelines more specifically apply to field work activities in outdoor settings on- or off- campus including at university satellite locations (e.g., aquaculture facilities, research farms, Darling Marine Center), and apply to all activities, both in indoor and outdoor settings, occurring at non-university facilities elsewhere in Maine. The above activities are hereafter referred to as “Field Research” for convenience.

Institutional Review

Effective April 8, 2020 through at least May 17th, essential research and scholarly activity, (as defined in the [COVID-19 Guidance for Researchers](#)) which involves activity on the University of Maine’s Orono or Machias campuses, its other facilities in the state, and/or in the field is subject to institutional review and approval. The [request form](#) requires a justification for why the activity cannot be delayed, why it is essential research, information regarding the associated research personnel (including students) and the steps that will be taken to ensure the safety of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. New requests will be forwarded to the appropriate college dean or center director who will review the activity to both determine essentiality and ensure that established unit-specific safety protocols are followed. If approved by the college/center, the OVPRDGS will review the request and make a final determination which will be communicated to the individual with a copy to the applicable college/center.

General Guidance for ‘Essential’ Fieldwork through May 17th:

Faculty and staff are encouraged to defer all non-essential field research through at least May 17th. The University will closely monitor mandates and guidance from both the State and UMS and will update this guidance accordingly. Faculty & staff are encouraged to discuss proposed ‘essential’ field work plans with their college or center leadership *before* submitting a request.

In addition to the justification regarding why the activity cannot be delayed and how it meets the definition of essential research, key review criteria are noted below:

1. Requests must comply with contemporaneous [UMS COVID-19 travel policies](#). Presently all university-sponsored out-of-state travel is prohibited. In-state travel is limited, and anyone traveling on official university business may not carpool or share transportation.
2. As part of Field Research plans, ensure you have conducted a standard fieldwork hazard assessment and have developed a safety plan [UMS Safety Management's [Field Research Hazard Assessment/Safety Plan \(PDF\)](#)] which also addresses the elevated risks and extra precautions needed due to the COVID-19. These considerations must be met:
 - Involves only participants who are asymptomatic and have not been in contact with known symptomatic or positive-testing individuals.
 - Social distancing must occur within the work itself, including physical separation.
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like respirators, eye protection and gloves are to be used as a last resort, and only when all other protective controls (such as engineering, substitutive, or administrative) have been exhausted. The use of PPE such as an n95 would be an exceptional circumstance, as stock of such protective equipment has been requested by MEMA to support the working medical professionals.
 - Interactions must be kept to a minimum. This includes interactions with the community on and off work, as well as within the team.
 - A clear plan as part of fieldwork safety must include how elements of social distancing, interactions, transportation, emergency actions, training, isolation prior to work, disinfection, touch protocols, and communication related to COVID-19 will be handled.

General Guidance for Fieldwork planned beyond May 17, 2020:

Researchers are encouraged to continue planning for Field Research and to plan for contingencies in the event of new constraints or opportunities in the coming spring and summer months. Contingency planning should not increase spending above currently budgeted amounts. Do not commit funds until plans are approved.

Given the high uncertainty on the present and near-future status of the COVID-19 pandemic in Maine, Field Research plans for the coming months (May, June and possibly July) will need to have particularly strong elements for minimizing risks as noted above, justification for essential Field Research activities (as defined at the time of the activity), and demonstration of efforts to reprioritize or defer Field Research activities to the extent reasonable. Researchers are encouraged to discuss proposed late-spring/early summer field work plans with their college or center leadership *before* submitting a request. Researchers are welcome to submit a [request form](#) to initiate a review, but please note that institutional approval may be delayed until after expiration of the [Governor Mills' Stay Healthy at Home Mandate](#) and the present State of Emergency.