



Animal Care and Use Program | Occupational Health and Safety

Conducting Wildlife Studies Safely

Wildlife studies provide unique challenges with regard to occupational health and safety issues. Principal Investigators (PIs) are responsible for maintaining safe work practices even in an unpredictable environment. PIs are required to conduct a risk assessment to identify hazards and clearly communicate safety concerns to their research staff. All participants must have the minimal level of skill, experience, training, and physical fitness to safely perform the field activities. Although not all hazards can be addressed, this fact sheet has been developed to identify many of the risks encountered in the field and provide recommendations to minimize those risks. This is not an all inclusive list of possible hazards.

Hazards to consider:

- Hazards Related to Environment and Location
 - Weather – heat, cold, snow, lightening, flooding, strong winds/tornadoes, hurricanes
 - Terrain – wetlands, secluded areas, high cliffs, dense brush or forest
 - Allergens – pollen, poison ivy, stinging nettle, wild parsnip, bee stings, insect bites
 - [Vector-borne diseases](#) – West Nile virus, malaria, Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted fever
 - Wildlife – venomous snakes, spiders, scorpions and centipedes, animal bites, zoonotic diseases
 - Chemical use – pesticides, herbicides, site contamination
 - Local customs and ordinances

- Hazards Related to Field Activity
 - Project animals – bites, scratches, kicks, zoonotic diseases, mucous membrane exposure, biological fluids
 - Project activities - boating, swimming, climbing, all terrain vehicles
 - Needle sticks – blood-borne pathogens and parasites, disease transmission
 - Capture/restraint equipment – darts, traps, guns
 - Chemical use – disinfectants, anesthetics, medications, formalin

- General Hazards
 - Communication/transportation failure
 - Participant injury/illness
 - Distance from emergency medical care
 - Non-potable water and inedible food
 - Inadequate personal hygiene facilities
 - Working alone
 - Uninformed landowners

Responsibilities while conducting Wildlife Studies:

- Investigator must provide their research staff with
 - [Risk assessments](#) concerning the activities in which they will be participating
 - Minimum training/experience requirements prior to joining the project
 - Written Standard Operating Procedures for project activities as well as injury reporting, dealing with transportation or communication failure, etc.
 - Information about non-study animals in the area
 - Information about vector-borne diseases, zoonoses and protection measures to take for allergens in the area
 - Material Safety Data Sheets for chemicals being used
 - Information about local ordinances, traditions and customs especially if working outside of the US
 - First aid kit including items to treat allergic reactions such as Benadryl, epinephrine pen, bee sting kit, calamine lotion
 - Appropriate personal protective equipment including insect repellent and sunscreen if necessary
 - Effective disinfectant to decontaminate equipment
 - Safety equipment such as life jackets, ropes, harnesses, gloves

- Personnel must provide information concerning
 - Up-to-date tetanus immunization and other required vaccines
 - Severe medical conditions or allergies and inform all other team members on how to identify the onset of a problem and first aid measures that should be taken
 - Training/testing of experience requirements

- Training must include
 - Project activities
 - Operating equipment such as boats, off-road vehicles, dart guns and heavy equipment

- Best Practices
 - Keep records of training
 - [Report injuries](#) and keep records
 - If possible, work in teams and when working alone make sure someone is aware of your location
 - Keep first aid kit and emergency supplies available at all times
 - At least one team member certified in CPR and First Aid
 - Policies for alcohol/drug use, cell phone use while driving, etc.
 - Contact local authorities when working in remote location and ask for safety recommendations.
 - Contact landowners for permission prior to arrival and give a reminder call before going onto their property
 - Conduct work in accordance with weather – appropriate clothing, taking breaks, stay hydrated

If you have any questions concerning the wildlife project on which you will be working, contact your PI.