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

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 August 1, 2020, we will transition to Phase Three of the Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise (PDF) which involves an increase in on-site research and scholarly activity and an expansion of allowable activity (limited to work that cannot be done remotely and is able to be done safely). As noted in the plan, field research will be further expanded on a case by case basis (depending on local conditions/restrictions at field sites, travel restrictions, ability to travel safely and ability to social distance at field sites).

During this phase we will continue to require submission of your not-previously submitted research and scholarly activity for approval using the request form which has been in place since March 24th. No previously approved research and scholarly activity needs to be resubmitted. Requests must include a Hierarchy of Controls (HOC) Task Assessment (Excel) and a signed Hierarchy of Controls Checklist (Word). Requests will be sent to the applicable College or Center and the Research Continuity Task force for the respective review and recommendation regarding approval. Requests approved by OVPRDGS will be forwarded to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for coordination with safety and facility management; you may be contacted by one or more of these offices if more information is needed. Notices of approval and other communications will be provided by OVPRDGS, through Tammy Crosby (tammy.crosby@maine.edu).

General Guidance for Fieldwork and Key Review Criteria:

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

Faculty & staff are encouraged to discuss proposed 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 fits within *Phase 3 of the Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise*, key review criteria are noted below:

1. All work conducted by everyone associated with UMaine and UMM must be conducted in accordance with guidance available on the [UMS Health Advisory](https://www.umaine.edu/health-advisory/) site and comply with guidance provided by UMS Safety Management which can be found on [the Safety Management website](https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/).

2. Requests must comply with contemporaneous [UMS COVID-19 travel policies](https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/). 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.

3. As part of Field Research plans, ensure you have conducted a standard fieldwork hazard assessment and have developed a safety plan [using UMS Safety Management’s (SM) Fieldwork Safety Program and Fieldwork Hazard Assessment/Safety Plan as guides (note: SM’s portal page requires an @maine.edu log-in)]. In addition to the standard safety plan, you should also address the elevated risks and extra precautions needed due to the COVID-19 using the [Hierarchy of Controls (HOC) Task Assessment (Excel)](https://www.umaine.edu/health-advisory/) and a signed [Hierarchy of Controls Checklist (Word)](https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/). These considerations must be met:

   - Involves only participants who are asymptomatic and have not been in contact with known symptomatic of 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.
   - When employees are in a “public setting,” OR are conducting activities/tasks where social distancing is not possible, they are required to wear a cloth face covering (see [UMS Health Advisory](https://www.umaine.edu/health-advisory/) “Should I wear a face covering when working?”)
   - 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.

The response to COVID-19 continues to be a rapidly evolving situation even at this stage of the pandemic and this guidance is subject to change. Please be sure to regularly review available Research Guidelines at the above links. Also, please continue to regularly check the UMS Information page ([https://www.maine.edu/health-advisory/](https://www.maine.edu/health-advisory/)) and the UMaine Information page ([https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/](https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/)).