

Working Group Startup Research (WOOz) Recommendations:

Protocol for field work during the coronavirus pandemic

WOOz, 12 June 2020

Background and methods

At the initiative of the Faculty of Geosciences (depts. of Earth Sciences, Physical Geography), a protocol has been developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Science (IMAU, Biology). This protocol has since been submitted to all of the other faculties for inspiration and comments on the proposed use of the protocol throughout Utrecht University.

Area of concern

One of the sensitive issues in this protocol pertains to insuring field work. The WOOz has chosen to recommend having HR consider whether or not to insure field work on a case-by-case basis: "Prior to planning the field work and departure, contact the faculty HR department to clarify the university travel insurance coverage conditions for the field work in question."

Conclusion

The WOOz hereby requests approval for the protocol, as well as permission for any minor changes added after the comments round. Considering the urgency of this issue among many of the field workers, it is desirable that the protocol be approved quickly. Naturally, we will provide the WOB and CvB with an amended definitive version, if applicable.

Protocol for resuming field work during the coronavirus pandemic

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Prior to planning the field work and departure, contact the faculty HR department to clarify the university travel insurance coverage conditions for the field work in question.

Protocol for field research:

- Field work within the Netherlands may resume in accordance with this protocol.
- Field work outside the Netherlands is subject to the applicable government guidelines: field work is not permitted in countries with a code orange or red travel advisory.
- If students will be conducting field work outside the Netherlands, then the Graduate School or the education board must grant approval.
- Field work inside Europe is permitted if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not issued a negative travel advisory for the country (code orange or red), or if the country in question has not instituted its own travel limitations.
- Field work is currently not permitted in Africa, North- and South America and Asia. This measure will be reconsidered once a code yellow travel advisory is issued for these countries. Field work in other foreign regions must first be discussed with the Vice-Dean of Research. See the detailed information on expeditions and foreign field work below.
- This protocol applies to field work conducted by UU staff members and technicians, as well as Bachelor's, Master's and internship field work projects (1 or 2 students). Some additional issues apply to field excursions for educational purposes (see below).
- The protocol is based on the government's coronavirus control measures and the RIVM guidelines.
- The usual occupational health and safety rules will continue to apply to field work, in addition to the coronavirus control measures.
- When the work is conducted under the supervision of an external organisation, the organisation's own supplemental rules will also apply in addition to the UU agreements. In the event of a discrepancy between the two sets of rules, the parties must decide on measures to be implemented that are at least as stringent as the UU agreements.
- Draw up a risk assessment in advance. If the coronavirus control measures or general safety rules cannot be followed, then the field work must be postponed. When in doubt, please consult with the HSE coordinator.
- The field work supervisor must ask all field work participants if they have any symptoms that may be associated with a coronavirus infection. When in doubt, the participant in question may not participate in the field work, or the work must be cancelled entirely.
- Limit the number of participants to the absolute minimum: ideally, field work should be conducted by two persons, up to a maximum of five if necessary; if all five are students, then they may be accompanied by a (temporary) supervisor. Work in permanent teams during multi-day programmes and/or repeated field visits.
- Field trips should be limited to five permanent participants so that the field work supervisor can monitor compliance with the rules and agreements, with the assistance of a (temporary) student supervisor if necessary.
- Field excursions for educational purposes must be undertaken by bicycle and in a format that makes it possible to comply with the RIVM social distancing rules. This implies that groups of 11 people are permitted (9-10 students and 1-2 supervisors).

- If repeated field trips are necessary, try to utilise permanent teams if possible.
 - Transport should be arranged individually, by bicycle, car or public transport (following the guidelines regarding wearing face masks in public transport).
 - In principle, only one person should travel in each car, with a maximum of two persons (this is currently punishable by law in the Netherlands).
 - One car may hold up to two occupants if it is required by the nature of the work (for example, a driver and surveyor), or the specific circumstances (for example, driving over a beach in an all-terrain vehicle).
 - No field visits may be conducted to crowded locations / during peak periods. Limit any contact with the public. If possible, a field work area may be cordoned off and onlookers may be kept at a safe distance.
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- The field work leader also acts as the coronavirus coordinator.
 - The field work leader must provide disinfectant materials.
 - Delegate tasks in advance to ensure that equipment is used by as few people as possible.
 - Limit cross-contamination, regularly disinfect equipment, and disinfect it again before storing or handing it over to someone else. Do the same with contact surfaces in company cars.
 - Use face masks when performing physically demanding activities, in order to reduce aerosol emissions from breathing.
 - Personal protective equipment and clothing are personal, and should not be shared for the duration of the field work.
 - When returning to the lab: follow the laboratory rules, and thoroughly clean any materials.

Logistically complex field work, such as excavation, salvage or maritime expeditions using ships and helicopters, present additional specific problems. This issue is not as urgent as long as code red or orange travel advisories are in effect, and some countries are still in lockdown or may soon (re-)enter lockdown.

Protocol for logistically complex field work:

- Try to postpone the field work if possible, and of course follow the rules stipulated above.
- Expeditions that utilise helicopters must follow the international guidelines for the aviation industry and the aviation company (no specific UU protocols are necessary).
- The protocols for maritime expeditions will be drawn up by the shipping company/captain, chief scientist. These protocols must be followed (no specific UU protocols are necessary for participating in a cruise). However, these protocols must be at least as stringent as the UU agreements.
- Be prepared for possible quarantine periods for personnel and equipment both before and after the field work.
- Try to avoid flying or other forms of public transport.
- Arrange for sufficient protection, including high-quality face masks when travelling to and from the field work area.