



1 September 2023

**Office of Polar Programs Director's FY 24
Safety Policy Reminder**

The Office of Polar Programs (OPP) continually emphasizes the importance of safety and is fully committed to a safety-oriented culture, in all locations, whether a stateside office or remote polar research site.

A safety culture requires not only an individual commitment, but also working together as trusting teams. Each person must trust that they can ask questions (even basic questions about their job processes), speak up when they see a danger, or request a "time out" without fear of reprisal. Everyone should feel a responsibility to identify (and work with others to fix) hazards and other safety concerns. A safe working (and living environment when deployed) is the job of everyone, individually and collectively working together.

Physical and psychological health are both necessary for occupational safety. Prevention is key. Physical health in the workplace includes a vast range of components. In the polar environment, recognizing the impact of cold and other weather conditions is essential, including situational awareness on the ice to prevent slips and falls and the range of cold injuries. Altitude, as well as long periods of light and dark, bring their risks. Hydration is always a challenge, especially in dry polar regions. Ergonomics are important in all environments and should be considered when developing any processes. Appropriate ergonomic practices are always important, especially when working in cold weather, whether with repetitive physical activities, lifting, good posture when sitting and standing, or other concerns. Consider a morning stretch routine with your teams! Your body will thank you later!

COVID-19 has impacted occupational safety; and this year we will continue to transition from prevention to management. However, if you have signs of COVID, don't go to NSF offices, or, if deployed, inform station health care providers, who will provide the appropriate evaluation and treatment. These precautions are both for you and to help prevent spread of the infection to others. For more information on our planned COVID protocols, go to

https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/documents/policy/COVID19_management_planFY24.pdf.

The physical qualification process (PQ) is a risk mitigating tool that helps keep the participant safe as well as our emergency responders. Process improvements are underway to ensure the participant can easily navigate the PQ process via improved communications and information availability. My expectation is that we accurately evaluate and calculate a participant's total health risk (composition of all their health challenges) and that the participant clearly understand the reason for the PQ determination. OPP values the participant's skillset and dedication to NSF's science mission. In order to execute the science mission and maintain the health and well-being of the participant, all participants must honestly complete their PQ forms and testing as required and I thank you ahead of time for your cooperation. For more info on the PQ process, visit <https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/soh/index.jsp>.

Safety includes all aspects of our work environment – from specific proactive activities such as required and relevant training, surveillance of work sites and activities, compliance with standards, reporting and correcting unsafe conditions, familiarization with proper use of PPE (personal protective equipment) and medical surveillance for those exposed to various noise and other environmental hazards to simply getting enough rest. Safety is also broader and includes working together in partnership and collaboration as an effective team and watching out for each other's safety, which leads to psychological safety – acceptance and inclusivity of diversity – so that every team member can maximize their individual and collective productivity.

Continuous improvement is a critical component to all safety programs. The NSF now provides additional support for researcher field risk management initiatives through enhanced collaboration with academic institutions, the research community, NSF colleagues, and science support contractors on identifying high risk field activities and solutions for mitigating the risk. Key to the success of field safety is early planning, such as at the proposal stage, to ensure adequate resources are secured. Following through on a field risk management plan also involves communication with the entire science team as well as coordination with multiple stakeholders. Sharing lessons learned from field activities can help set up the next generation of researchers for success.

Last, I want to thank our polar community for taking the time to share with us in the past year at the Antarctic Sexual Assault/Harassment Prevention and Response (SAHPR) Listening Sessions, town halls and other fora. We recognize it will take time to affect meaningful and lasting change. NSF is committed to continuing the work to combat sexual misconduct and to ensure all research environments are safe, harassment and assault-free spaces, with a positive and inclusive culture.

For all NSF supported sites and research, to report an incident, request information or learn more about NSF's SAHPR program, email: saferscience@nsf.gov.

In the Antarctic, if you have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment or sexual assault in the current or a prior USAP season, you can seek support and help through the confidential sexual assault and sexual harassment USAP Victim's Advocate (USAPadvocate@LDSScorp.com; 720-568-1083). Additionally, if you need crisis support for sexual assault or sexual harassment you can reach the NSF Antarctic Helpline (NSFAntarcticHelpline.org; 833-673-1733).

Whether working in NSF or contractor offices states side, telecommuting, or during deployment, each member of the OPP team at large, whether employee, grantee, contractor, IPA, or military, or other is valued and makes a meaningful contribution. Working together, we can demonstrate that safety – including both physical and psychological safety - is a core value. (More information is available in the NSF OPP Safety and Occupational Health policy, https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/documents/policy/SOH_POL_2000.10a_V6.pdf and related station Standard Operating Procedures).

If you want to learn more about the OPP safety culture, talk with your team leader. If you have any questions about the policy, you may also contact the Safety and Occupational Health Officer, Mr. Jon Fentress (jfentres@nsf.gov).

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