



Guidance Document

Title: Community-Based Education &
Research Project Safety & Security

Section: SHERM

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Health practitioners have been striving to achieve the goal of “healthy communities and healthy people through prevention for centuries (HCPHES, 2006). Since John Snow’s seminal work in 1854, public health practitioners have collected data from the field to gain a better understanding of actual health status and conditions in the community. Although community based research is essential to the improvement of our collective quality of life, it is not without some concurrent risk to researchers. Community field work can possibly expose researchers to risks such as vehicular traffic, theft of property, physical assault, or psychological trauma. This document is intended to serve as a guide to assist community based public health practitioners in the recognition of the potential risks associated with their important work, and to summarize the best practice steps that can be considered to eliminate or minimize any risks.

Although the vast majority of interactions in the communities served by public health practitioners are quite safe, some areas and situations can result in an environment of heightened risk. The existing body of published literature on the risks of community based research is scant (Williams, T., Dunlap, E., Johnson, B., Hamid, A., 1992 and Paterson, B., Gregory, D., Thorne, S., 1999). But this limited amount of published information can be augmented with the procedures used by businesses and services that are regularly involved with similar exposures, such as postal service employees, social workers, and home service providers, to create a list of “best practices” that may be considered as a possible means of reducing risk, while still facilitating the completion of the important research activity.

The potential community based risks that might be encountered include:

- Risks of traveling to and from the community to be served
- Risks of working in an unfamiliar environment, potentially with new distractions present

- Risks of operating unfamiliar equipment or machinery
- Theft or damage to property of the practitioner
- Physical harm to the practitioner
- Psychological trauma experienced by the practitioner
- Situations that could promote accusations of improper behavior on the part of the practitioner

What can be done to reduce or eliminate these risks?

The UT Police Department has provided a list of tips to keep people safe while working and living in the community. This list is not meant to be all inclusive; however, it does reflect industry accepted best practices. See *Appendix A* for modern criminological theory; see *Appendix B* for situations involving international travel. Should the user of this document require additional information or training, please contact UTHealth Safety, Health, Environment, Risk Management (SHERM) 3500-8100, UT Police Department (UTPD) at 713-2890, or the Office of Diversity & Equal Opportunity at 730-3130.

Before the trip

- Map out the route with Google maps, Waze, or another resource
- Carry local contact information local police and EMS contact info; and “home base” contact information including your supervisor’s office contact number and EHS’s contact number
- If meeting with someone, call them prior to departure to verify:
 - the correct address

- Choose well lit parking areas
- Look around for loiterers before getting out of your motor vehicle
- Always lock valuables and packages out of sight in the vehicle
- If you get out of your vehicle, always turn off the ignition, remove the key, and lock your vehicle doors, no matter how soon you plan to return. This is especially important at service stations and convenience stores
- Try not to park next to vans, large SUVs, pickup trucks, or other vehicles whose size and structure can provide concealment
- Exercise particular caution when using underground or enclosed parking garages. Always try to walk in the center aisle, rather than close to parked cars
- If you have the choice, park in areas that have an attendant or in locations with heavy pedestrian traffic

On site

- Maintain situational awareness; note distractions and take notice of potential threats
- Avoid walking alone whenever possible
- When walking, walk in the middle of the sidewalk and walk facing oncoming traffic
- Attempt to appear confident and purposeful when you walk and be alert to your surroundings at all times
- If you carry a purse, carry it close to your body, preferably in front. Carry no more money or credit cards than you absolutely need
- When walking, try not to overload yourself with packages or other items. Keep your hands as free as possible
- When walking, choose busy, well lit streets and avoid isolated areas, alleys, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and construction sites
- When walking during hours of darkness, wear light colored clothing and carry a flashlight
- If you carry a purse with a shoulder strap, be prepared to let it go if snatched. Otherwise, you could be knocked down and hurt
- When walking, carry a loud w0 Td (s)-2.t(hl)6. (l)-4. (be)-1.6(y)10.8(our)-3.9 (k)10.9 (i)-1.7 (g)10.6 (h

Additional guidelines for handling threatening situations:

- Do not respond or react to abusive language.
- Avoid engaging in verbal altercation with the a (t)-2.6 (h)12.8 (t)-2.6 (h)12hsaulbal.5 (i)-2.6 (t)-(a)11.3

Appendix A: Modern Criminology

The field of criminal justice has studied how individuals and groups create crime. There are two generally accepted criminal justice theories that are applicable to the protection of employees: the routine activities theory (RAT) and the rational choice theory (RCT).

The RAT rests atop three principles that are required for a crime to take place (Cohen and Felson 1979). These three elements include: (1) the presence of motivated offenders, (2) the presence of suitable targets, and (3) the absence of capable guardians.

In addition to the RAT, modern criminology also offers an additional theory; the rational choice theory (RCT) attempts to explain individuals' behavior (Chapman 2003). RCT assumes that people are motivated by their own self-interest while making everyday decisions. Individuals behave as rational creatures in that one can assume their actions are intentional and contain a consistent set of preferences (Malesevic, 2002). When these theories are combined they form The Crime Triangle.



There will always be two elements present, the victim and the criminal; however it is imperative that opportunity is reduced.

Appendix B: International Travel

The University of Texas System provides an insurance policy to all employees and students while traveling internationally on university business. This policy is provided to the student and employee free of charge. It is important that UT employees and students are aware of the resources available to them for safe and efficient travel. For more information contact Safety, Health, Environment & Risk Management at 713-500-8100 or click on [OnCall International](#). Enter The University of Texas membership number, 100143CPPD21 to access the UT portal.

Abbreviated FAQ, visit OnCall International's website for the latest information.

What is OnCall International?

OnCall International provides The University of Texas System travelers and expatriates with worldwide quality health care and emergency assistance services 24 hours a day.

How can OnCall International help?

OnCall International services are designed to help you with medical, personal, security, and legal problems when away from home. Call OnCall International any time to speak with a physician or security specialist about simple or critical matters.

How does it work?

Carry the OnCall International membership card with you at all times. It includes the telephone numbers for worldwide access to OnCall International. In the event of an emergency, call one of the emergency phone numbers listed on the card. You can also always chat with a representative online from anywhere in the world at <https://www.oncallinternational.com/chat/direct>. Be sure to reference the Univone of

Appendix D: References

Chapman B. Rational choice and categorical reason. *Univ Pennsylvania Law Rev* 151:1169–1212; 2003.

Cohen LE, Felson M. Social change and crime rate trends: a routine activity approach. *Am Sociolog Rev* 44:588-611; 1979.

Craig, G., A.Corden & P.Thornton. Safety in Social Research. *Social Research Update*, Issue 29. University of Surrey. <http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU29.html>

Lee, R.M. (1993) *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*, London: Sage.

Appendix E

Community-Based Education & Research Project Safety & Security Plan Template

This document serves as a recommended template for completion during community-based research or educational activities at UTHealth Houston. It is intended to allow principle investigators to organize and document safety and security plans for each community-based project. At this time there is no formal process to submit this form to SHERM or UH Police. However, it is recommended that this information be written down, agreed upon for the project, and shared with all project participants so they understand the plans for safety and security.

Project Details

Project title:

Name of Principle Investigator (PI):

Department:

Contact details:

Details of Community-Based Research:

Proposed date(s) of community

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Overview of the Community-Based Research:

Provide a brief description of the community-based research to be conducted. Include details of the anticipated risks that may be encountered in the community settings included in the study or educational activities. Subsequently, include a description of the risk controls to be implemented.

Travel Plans:

Will you be travelling with a colleague/trusted person during the community-based research?

(It is recommended to use a buddy system when travelling into the community)

Details (Name/Contact):

Means of transportation while in community:

Any other special considerations for transportation?

Working in the Community:

What time will research / educational activities be conducted (day/night):

Will the research take place in a community service center?

Will the research involve door-to-door work (e.g. entering private homes)?

Will you be carrying anything of value that may be a risk for theft? (e.g. instruments, electronics, cash, etc.)

Any other special considerations for working in the community?

Reporting Emergencies:

Any unsafe or emergency situations should be reported immediately by ~~dialing~~ calling the local police. If traveling internationally, note any local emergency contact numbers that may be used. Also, list any local contact information for the area(s) where you will be traveling to conduct the ~~comm~~ ~~base~~ research.

| Local Emergency Contact Name | Phone number | Relationship to project |
|------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
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