

Community-Based Education & Research Project Safety & Security

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 travel to and from the community to be served
- 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?

Houston 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 UTHSC-H Safety, Health, Environment, Risk Management at 713-500-8100, UT Police Department at 713-792-2890, or The Houston Police Department at 713-884-3131

Before the trip

- Map out the route with Key maps, mapquest.com, or Google Local
- Carry local contact information and local police and EMS contact info
- If meeting with someone, call them prior to departure to verify:
 - the correct address
 - there will be someone there to meet you
 - correct parking location

Traveling

- Wear prudent attire, do not appear over or under dressed. Blend in with locals
- Inspecting vehicle for safety (tires, overloading, brakes, etc.)
- Project certainty of route and destination
- Avoid "high risk" regions
- Travel with a colleague/ trusted other
- Establish rapport with regular drivers
- Determine risk levels of varying means of transport (bus, train, taxi, hitch hiking, etc.)
- (Women) Sit with other women or middle aged couples

Parking

- 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 particularly 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

- 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 whistle or high-decibel personal alarm. Use them to attract attention or summon help if you feel you are in danger. Carry the whistle or alarm in your hand so you can use it immediately
- If followed or threatened by someone who is walking, use your whistle or personal alarm or scream loudly, cross the street and run in the opposite direction
- When entering any structure be aware of all exits. Make sure nothing blocks the exits

What to do if something occurs.

- At any point the situation doesn't feel safe, leave
- Contain any anger and fear and speak in an authoritative tone that is loud enough for others to hear, but don't scream or yell.
- If the person or persons are attempting a robbery hand them whatever they want, do not resist
- If the person or persons are attempting a rape, fight and don't stop fighting.

Reporting

- After an incident immediately call the local authorities
- The authorities are going to need the following information
 - Who was involved (this includes names or descriptions of unknown individuals)
 - What happened
 - Where the incident occurred (address or other descriptors if address is unknown)
 - When the incident took place
 - Are there any injuries

What you should not do.

- Do not carry fire arms or other offensive tools. These tools require special training and may be subject to certain legal requirements.

- Do not consume alcohol before or during community based work
- Do not carry large amounts of cash or valuables on your person or vehicle
- If cash gifts, cash equivalents, or gift certificates are required for compensation for participating in research only carry the minimum amount to complete the study in the time allotted for the visit.
- Do not carry cash gifts, cash equivalents, or gift certificates required for field research in a manor that can be seen by the public. Cover in an envelope prior to delivery.

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 Risk Management & Insurance (RMI) (713/500-8100) or click on [International SOS](https://www.internationalsos.com/) (https://www.internationalsos.com/). Enter the University of Texas membership number, 11BSGC000037 to access the UT portal.

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

What is International SOS?

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

How can International SOS help?

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

How does it work?

Carry the International SOS membership card with you at all times. It includes the telephone numbers of the three major worldwide International SOS Alarm Centers. In the event of an emergency, call one of the emergency phone numbers listed on the card. If you do not have a card, you can print the card from International SOS's website; click on [International SOS](https://www.internationalsos.com/) (https://www.internationalsos.com/). Enter the University of Texas membership number, 11BSGC000037 to access the UT portal.

What do I need to do to use the program?

In order to utilize any of the medical or travel services listed under Program Benefits, contact any Alarm Center from anywhere in the world by calling directly, calling collect or calling the toll-free number.

To ensure a prompt response when calling, you should be prepared to provide the following:

- Your name, location, age, sex and nationality
- Your International SOS membership number: 11BSGC000037
- The telephone number from which you are calling (in case you are disconnected)
- Your relationship to the University of Texas System employee (if the person calling is not the employee)
- Name, location and telephone number of the hospital, clinic or treating doctor (when applicable)

What if I have pre-trip questions about my travel destination?

In addition to calling the Alarm Center for any pre-trip questions you may have, you can access Country Guides from this website. These comprehensive guides provide both medical and general travel advice, such as information on the standard of health care, how to pay for medical care, the availability of medications, safety of the blood supply, embassy/visa information, dialing code information, cultural etiquette and financial and voltage/plug information.

Do I need to activate my membership?

No, your membership is already active. Simply carry the card in your wallet at all times while traveling. Whenever you need service, contact one of the emergency phone numbers listed on the back of the card. You do not need to report specific trip dates to International SOS each time you travel.

Are my spouse and children covered under the International SOS program?

Family members of expatriates are covered under the International SOS program.

What are Email Alerts?

You have the option to sign up for Email Alerts. You can choose to sign up for medical and/or security alerts. Medical alerts are issued when there is a unusual health risk that, in the opinion of the International SOS Medical staff, may negatively impact travelers or expatriates visiting a country. Security alerts are issued when International SOS Security professionals have identified a security risk in a specific country.

What if I need a doctor?

The International SOS Worldwide Alarm Centers are listed on the back of your card. Call the International SOS Alarm Center that is nearest to you for a referral to a doctor who speaks your language.

What if I need a lawyer while overseas?

Call the nearest International SOS Worldwide Alarm Center for legal referrals.

What if I need prescription medication?

If you require a prescription that a local physician cannot obtain, or you need to replace lost, stolen or depleted medication, International SOS will, when permissible by local law, send the needed medication to you .

What if I am hospitalized?

Call the nearest International SOS Worldwide Alarm Center. International SOS will immediately take steps to evaluate the care you are receiving and determine what actions must be taken to ensure your safe and speedy recovery.

What if local medical facilities are not adequate?

If you are hospitalized in an area where adequate medical facilities are not available, International SOS will obtain approval from University of Texas System to evacuate you to a medical facility capable of providing the required care. A physician supervises evacuations and, when necessary, a medical specialist or nurse will accompany you during the evacuation. An air ambulance will be used when required.

What happens when I am released from the hospital and still need help?

When your condition is stabilized and International SOS has determined that it is medically advisable to bring you home or to a facility near your permanent residence, International SOS will again obtain approval from University of Texas System and arrange the repatriation under medical supervision.

Will International SOS pay my medical bills?

If necessary, after approval from University of Texas System, International SOS will guarantee and pay all costs associated with your medical care. International SOS will also medically monitor and evaluate your condition and ongoing medical expenses during your hospitalization.

What should I do in the event of a security emergency?

Contact International SOS, and a security specialist will assist you.

What is security evacuation assistance and coordination?

The International SOS Security Division will assist you in the event of threatening situations such as civil and/or political unrest, insurrections, revolution or similar situations by providing information, guidance and resources in the event personal safety and security can no longer be assured.

How do I access up-to-the-minute information about security alerts, warnings and the latest situations?

You can visit the [International SOS Security Online](http://internationalsos.com/members_Home/Security) website (internationalsos.com/members_Home/Security).

Additional information about international travel can be found by visiting the links listed below.

US Department of State

travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html

Peace Corps

peacecorps.gov

Additional Resources

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is the only UK charity entirely devoted to providing everyone in society with the practical support and personal safety guidance they need to reduce their fear of crime and develop skills and strategies for keeping themselves safe.

suzylamplugh.org/

The National Crime Council

The National Crime Prevention Council's mission is to be the nation's leader in helping people keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe from crime.

ncpc.org/

Houston Police Department

houstontx.gov/police/crime_prevention.htm

University of Texas Police Department

mdanderson.org/utpd/

Bibliography

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. soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU29.html

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

Malesevic S. Rational choice theory and the sociology of ethnic relations: a critique. *Ethnic Racial Studies* 25:193–212; 2002.

Messner S, South J. Interracial homicide: a macrostructural-opportunity perspective. *Sociological Forum* 7:517–536; 1992.

Paterson, B., Gregory, D., Thorne, S. A Protocol for Researcher Safety Qual Health Res 1999 9: 259-269

Williams, T., Dunlap, E., Johnson B., Hamid, A. Personal Safety In Dangerous Places. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 1992 21: 343-374