

Personal Safety Fact Sheet

Crime can happen anywhere and at any time. It is important to be aware of your surroundings and location and to secure your belongings. Those working alone are particularly vulnerable to crime, especially at night. It is highly recommended that nobody travel alone in field areas, even during personal leisure time. Major concerns include:

Theft

Aggressive Encounters

Assault

Robbery

PREPARATION AND TRAINING

- Check-in procedures/[buddy systems](#) are essential for lone workers. Be sure someone is aware of where you are going and what time you should return. This is especially important if visiting a home. If confidentiality is an issue, leave addresses and names in a sealed envelope to be opened only in case of emergency. Maintain an emergency response procedure. For example, you may want to have a designated person call or text halfway during an interview to check-in.
- Have emergency numbers memorized or programmed into your fully charged cell phone.
- You must have written permission of the property owner, or controlling agency, to conduct research on their property.
- Abide by all posted signs/placards. If an area is posted to be off limits or closed (e.g. No Trespassing), and you do not have written permission by the landowner or controlling agency, you may not access the area.
- Obey any restrictions on sample (rock, plant, animal, etc.) collection. In National Parks and many other public lands, it is illegal to perform any sample collections without special permits. If you collect, you could face a penalty or fine or jail.
- Inform community leaders that you will be conducting research in their area. Communicating with these leaders may inform you of unexpected local events, customs, and hazards that may impact your work or safety. Non-profit organizations doing community outreach can also be a resource for specific information on neighborhood issues and can facilitate contact with community leaders.
- Consider informing the local authorities (e.g. local law enforcement) about your research activities, so that they are aware of your presence.
- If you are traveling internationally, familiarize yourself with [medical/security risks](#), local customs, political/economic tensions, laws, U.S. Department of State Advisories or Warnings, security concerns, and other potential hazards. All university-sponsored travel must be booked via a Stanford Travel [booking channel](#).
- International SOS provides country-specific medical and security guidance, among a [range of other services](#). Travelers are also strongly encouraged to download the International SOS Assistance app.
- Consider hiring a local [and verified](#) guide or interpreter.

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- Be familiar with the location of the local Medical Facilities (e.g. Hospital, Police Department, and U.S. Embassy).
- Ask the local law enforcement what areas are high crime, especially at night, and the type of crimes.

GENERAL SAFETY

- Whenever possible, work in groups of two or more.
- Park your vehicle in well-lighted areas and near other vehicles.
- Always lock your vehicle.
- Do not leave valuables in vehicles in plain sight.
- Do not pick up hitchhikers.
- Wear conservative clothing and limit jewelry.
- Do not wear shoes or restrictive clothing that hinders your ability to run or may restrict breathing (scarves, ties, etc.).
- Do not approach people who are loitering especially in confined areas (elevators, stairwells, etc.).
- When walking on sidewalks, do not walk close to potential hiding spots (e.g. vegetation and trees).
- Minimize the amount of money you carry and practice discretion while handling money.
- When withdrawing money from the ATM, be aware of anyone around you at all times.
- Do not use an ATM if anyone appears to be loitering.
- Avoid wearing a purse over the shoulder to prevent a purse snatch. Consider a cross body bag instead or use a fanny pack.
- Do not allow strangers to use your phone.
- When at an event or a club, do not leave your drink unattended.
- If you do not have access to a lavatory, use facilities at a public building such as a police station or government office.
- Exercise caution in taking photographs, always ask permission before photographing people.
- Try to diffuse any aggressive confrontations by explaining your research project. If possible, display a credential on your person (e.g. lanyard) or show any paperwork to confirm your purpose. If that is ineffective or you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, leave the area immediately.
- Consider your word choice when describing your research to members of the public. Words that you may use in publications may give the wrong impression or sound offensive to community members. For example, the phrase “introduced species” may give someone the impression that you are releasing a species as part of an experiment, a better phrase to use would be “invasive species.”
- Do not confront anyone who appears to be committing a crime or exhibiting suspicious activity or behavior. Remove yourself from the situation and alert law enforcement from a safe location.

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- Be conscientious to landowners when working in your field location. Do not intentionally damage or disturb vegetation, livestock, or natural formations. If there is any damage, you should immediately notify the landowner.

Interviews and Surveys

- Try to conduct interviews and surveys in public locations, like a library or restaurant.
- Anticipate any potential aggression triggers (e.g., interview subject matter) and set expectations before any face-to-face interaction.
- Do not continue if a subject becomes aggressive, angry, or threatening.
- Do not touch somebody without express permission, even if done in a consoling manner.
- Ask permission before writing, photographing, or recording anything. If possible, obtain written permission.
- Avoid distracted behaviors (cracking knuckles, checking phone, etc.) that may irritate your subject.
- Do not conduct an interview in the subject's vehicle.

House Calls

- Make every effort to schedule the visit for daylight hours.
- Anticipate your escape options, if the situation becomes volatile (e.g. exit doors).
- If you feel unsafe or threatened, immediately leave the situation.
- Do not enter a house if the person you are there to see is not present, they seem to be inappropriately dressed, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Make sure you only bring what you need into a home, as you may have to leave quickly. If you must leave quickly due to a threat, you may not have time to gather up items except your cell phone.
- Keep your cell phone on your person rather than in a bag.
- Ask that animals be secured before entering.
- Be aware of anything you observe in a room where the interview is conducted that could harm you.

International Concerns

- Keep in mind gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation status may have legal or cultural restrictions in some areas.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- If you are a victim of a crime in the U.S., contact local law enforcement immediately.
- If you are the victim of a crime overseas, contact the local law enforcement to report the incident and get immediate help. However, be aware that law enforcement in other countries may not be as responsive, professional, or reliable as they are in the U.S. If ever in doubt regarding the

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trustworthiness or reliability of local law enforcement, contact International SOS at +1-215-942-8478 or via the chat feature in the International SOS Assistance app.

- Contact your international insurance provider and [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#), for assistance navigating the local processes.
- Request a copy of the police report (if applicable).

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Association of Social Workers [Guidelines for Social Worker Safety in the Workplace](#)

Travel advisories are presented by the [U.S. Department of State](#).

Global Risk Management International Travel [Resources](#)

Illness, injury and close call events shall be reported by submitting an [SU-17](#).

If you have questions or need support, contact EH&S's Field Safety Program at ehs_field_safety_support@lists.stanford.edu.

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