

## Strategies for Safer Science Field Trips!

### SAFER SCIENCE: Be Protected!

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### Bon Voyage & Bonne Chance!

Secondary and Tertiary level schools often have employees (teachers) and students take long distance field trips in order to gain valuable first-hand experience in science history, applications of science curriculum studies, hands-on activities and more. This is exciting and memorable for both teachers and students in most instances. However, this is based on solid safety preparation, application, and supervision for the science educator and school involved in sponsoring the trip. All of these actions are in support of the bigger legal issue called “duty or standard of care!” This is the legal obligation of the school employer and employees to plan in efforts to have students/chaperones/employees avoid risk of foreseeable injury. Whether traveling to a local field site a mile down the road or across the ocean to another country, duty of care applies. If things go wrong, there could be legal implications for both the science teacher and the school, including negligence! There potentially could be incidents including civil unrest, fires, infectious diseases, kidnapping, lawlessness, natural disasters, political upheaval, terrorism and more. These are not the kinds of things that people even want to think about but, the reality is – they do happen. So how can science teachers and their schools have the appropriate processes in place to protect students, school employees and the school itself?

### Strategies for Safer Science Field Trips!

#### CHECK LIST

- Assess Risk
- Plan Strategically
- Develop Policies
- Track & Inform
- Manage Mobility
- Communicate, Educate, & Train
- Advise, Assist, & Evacuate

There are a number of strategies that should be embraced in efforts to provide for a safer science

A successful field trip involves advance planning and preparation!



field trip and meet duty of care obligations. Trips require not only initial planning but also ongoing telemetry information should the health/safety/security status of the site change.

One helpful resource involving planning strategies is an article titled “A Global View of the University’s Duty of Care Obligations” by Lisbeth Claus and Russell Yost of Willamette University, published in the University Risk Management and Insurance Association’s URMIA Journal. (see Resource) Although the focus is on university level travel abroad and employees, the approach is also applicable to middle and high school employees and students traveling both locally, intrastate or interstate and abroad.

The focus of the publication is how to address a school’s duty of care obligations by using three components – a “Plan” phase, a “Do” phase and a “Check” phase. A schematic of the program was presented as follows (Page. 32):

Each of the three components contains one or more subcomponents.

The “Plan” phase included the following:

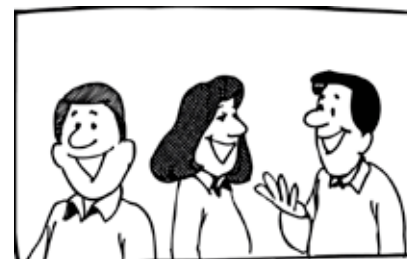
1. Assess Risk: Determine specific health, safety and security risks where employees (students) will be located; e.g. travel, shelter, etc. (Make sure health issues of students and employees are also considered relative to access to medications, etc.)
2. Plan Strategically: In order to meet duty of care obligations, develop an incident management or protocol plan and an ongoing duty of care process. (Situations can change and quickly. Make sure there are step-by-step safety incident protocols developed and in place to address any foreseeable challenges.)
3. Develop Policies and procedures: There needs to be policies developed for those who are traveling/working to assist in keeping employees



(students) healthy, safe and secure. (Employees should take part in this process especially if they have experience in field work.)

The “Do” phase includes the following:

4. Manage Mobility: Determine how the organization oversees employee mobility as international assignees or international business travelers. (This is important even if local travel and field work is done.)
5. Communicate, Educate, and Train: Make sure all policies and procedures are communicated to supervisors and employees so they



are prepared prior to travel. (Training of all travelers - teachers, chaperones, and students is critical. Everyone needs to be on the same page, especially if they for some reason are separated.)

6. Track and Inform: Make sure the location of employees is known at any time. Also have a means of communicating with them should a situation change or there is an emergency. (Cell phones, walkie/talkies, two-way radios, Internet access, etc. as applicable are a must for communications. The school in many instances has a view of the bigger picture and can provide an effective means of support.)
7. Advise, Assist, and Evacuate:

Be able to provide ongoing guidance, support, and assistance for employees who find themselves in situations dealing with health, safety

or security issues. (This includes use of social media like Twitter and Facebook.)

The “Check” phase includes the following:

8. Make sure there is employee and employer compliance by tracking and analyzing data in efforts to improve strategy effectiveness.

**In The End!**



Duty of care is critical not only on site at a school but also on field trips/travel. It is not only important to have a plan, employee/student training, communications and ongoing assessment. Make sure travelers are fully briefed on the destination site. This includes before traveling, during, and departure.

Also make sure adequate risk assessment has been effected to help provide for a safer experience. Equally important is a means of ensuring the employees/students are kept up-to-date with the latest information on their destination

**Resource:**

Claus L. and R. Yost: A Global View of the University’s Duty of Care Obligations; *URMIA Journal* 2010; pages 29-36; [http://irc.nacubo.org/Documents/University\\_Duty\\_of\\_Care.pdf](http://irc.nacubo.org/Documents/University_Duty_of_Care.pdf)

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