

Farmington River Watershed Association

Field Sampling Safety Protocol- 24 October 2021

One of the most critical considerations for a volunteer monitoring program is the safety of its volunteers. All volunteers should be trained in safety procedures and should carry with them a set of safety instructions and the phone number of their program coordinator or team leader. Safety precautions can never be overemphasized.

Streams can be hazardous places, so take care to sensibly evaluate risks before you begin sampling. Banks and bottom substrate can often be soft, unstable, rocky, slippery, or any combination of these conditions; these types of terrain can pose serious threats to volunteers who have an increased risk of injury. If at any time you feel uncomfortable about the condition of the stream or your surroundings, stop monitoring and leave the site at once. **Remember: your safety is far more important than data!**

Develop a Safety Plan

- Pay attention to weather reports. Never go sampling if severe weather is predicted or if a storm occurs while at the site.
- Wear highly visible clothing when sampling near roads or hunting areas.
- Put your wallet, cell phone, and keys in a safe place, such as a watertight bag you keep in a pouch strapped to your waist. Without proper precautions, wallet and keys might end up downstream.
- Have a first aid kit handy.
- Keep emergency telephone numbers and medical information with you at the field site for everyone participating in field work in case there is an emergency. Make sure all team members have exchanged contact information before heading into the field.
- Locate the nearest medical center and write down directions on how to get between the center and your site so that you can direct emergency personnel.
- Plan to travel in teams. Always monitor with at least one partner.
- Always let someone else know where you are, when you intend to return, and what to do if you don't come back at the appointed time.
- If you drive, find a safe location to park. Be sure your car doesn't pose a hazard to other drivers and that you don't block traffic. Take care when parking and exiting your vehicle, and when crossing busy roads.
- Know your equipment, sampling instructions, and procedures before going out into the field. Prepare labels and clean equipment before you get started.

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Winter Sampling Safety

- Streambank conditions can be more slippery and unstable than during the rest of the year. Be aware of ice sheets and deep snow, and do not approach the site if you are not sure that you can collect your sample safely.
- Do not sample near busy traffic areas during inclement weather events.
- Dress appropriately for cold weather. Wear waders with warm base layers if you will be entering the stream, and be sure to stay dry! Winter stream temperatures can be cold enough to induce hypothermia.
- Bring a spare change of warm clothes in case yours get wet.

At The Site

- Do not monitor if the stream is posted as unsafe for body contact. Wear waders and rubber gloves in streams suspected of having significant pollution problems. If the water appears to be severely polluted, contact your program coordinator.
- Take care scaling steep and rocky embankments, and do not walk on unstable stream banks. Disturbing these banks can accelerate erosion and might prove dangerous if a bank collapses. Try to disturb streamside vegetation as little as possible.
- Do not attempt to wade into streams that are swift and above the knee in depth, or into streams of unknown depth. Do not monitor if the stream is at flood stage.
- Be very careful when walking in the stream itself. Rocky-bottom streams can be very slippery and can contain deep pools; muddy-bottom streams might also prove treacherous in areas where sediments have accumulated. You can use a walking stick to steady yourself and to probe for deep water or muck.
- It is best for one partner to enter the stream channel for sampling and for another partner to wait on dry land ready to assist.
- Never cross private property without the permission of the landowner. Better yet, sample only at public access points such as bridge or road crossings or public parks.
- Confirm that you are at the proper site location by checking maps, site descriptions, or directions.
- Watch for wildlife (particularly snakes), irate dogs, farm animals, and insects such as ticks, hornets, and wasps. Know what to do if you get bitten or stung.
- Watch for poison ivy, poison oak, sumac, and other types of vegetation in your area that can cause rashes and irritation.
- Never drink the water in a stream. Assume it is unsafe to drink, and bring your own water from home.
- If you are sampling from a bridge, be wary of passing traffic. Never lean over bridge rails unless you are firmly anchored to the ground or the bridge with good hand/foot holds.
- Wash your hands with antibacterial soap after monitoring.