# Citizen-based aquatic field sampling in the time of COVID

#### A Best Practices Brainstorm

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# Agenda

Introductions

On the line - polling questions

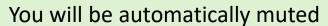
The problem

Existing guidance review

Compiling our recommendations

#### Housekeeping

We are recording



Ways to communicate

- Write comment in chatbox
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#### The Problem

#### **Health Concerns:**

- COVID spreading person to person
- COVID spreading via contaminated surfaces or water
- How to ensure safety of volunteers

#### **Project Coordination Concerns:**

- Lack of existing relevant guidelines for volunteer-based field work activities
- What is the liability if volunteers are allowed to monitor

#### Our Goals Today:

- Provide a space for groups to compare and share ideas
- Create a list of best practices that groups can work from in developing their plans

Existing Guidance Review



The Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST) - Univ. of Washington Seattle

Here are some tips for surveying with social distancing in mind:

- •If your survey requires access to a parking lot or restrooms that are closed, stay home
- •Stay home if you feel sick!
- •If you survey alone, or with family members you live with, survey as normal
- •If your survey partner(s) are outside of your household:
  - and you normally carpool, drive separately
  - · divide tasks so that only one person is touching supplies for the day
  - use disposable gloves
  - bring hand sanitizer and use it to clean all COASST kit materials (clip board, measuring devices, photo ruler, slate, field guide cover, rope handles) before and after your survey
  - keep a six-foot distance (your "wingspan" plus your partner's no fingers touching) between yourself and others
    - this means you may have to take-turns getting a good look at a carcass or piece of marine debris
    - for medium debris surveys, five meters is much longer than six feet (16.4 in fact), just be sure to disinfect the rope handles between uses

And if a COASST survey is simply not possible, we totally understand!

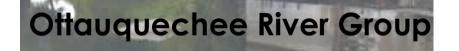


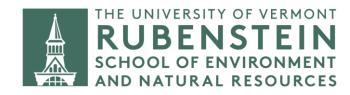
#### University of Rhode Island – Watershed Watch

- Classroom and field trainings moved online
- Later, some smaller field training sessions for under the 5 people per state guidelines
- Starting season later (June)
- Scheduling outdoor volunteer pick up and drop off times; possible pick up of samples vs. delivery
- Extended the time period over which samples are collected
- Limiting the student staff in the lab to maintain 6+ feet between people
- Offering packaged not homemade food

# Vermont Examples

- Ottauquechee River volunteer cancelled sampling days
  - For lab and on-site personnel safety
  - Project not essential
- Maintained some sampling days and lab analyses and cancelled others
  - Field-based, done on own, across from volunteer's home Go
  - At WWTP No Go
  - Lab analyses for samples in building Go







- CA Water Resources Control Board does not consider Volunteer Monitoring to be essential per Executive Order of the Governor of CA
- Sign-in form to ensure health is okay
- Project go/no go guidance (HSSE)
- Letter to confirm essential employee (Wood Environment and Infrastructure Solutions)
- Advance plans for social distancing and communications

# Compiling our Recommendations

#### For Coordinators

Project Considerations

#### For Field Crews

- Before Leaving Home
- In the Field
- In the Lab

Follow along and contribute input here:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1StnCyMerhwz9aXkN7-eQmUWeJLdHRBbD3ZgWwiE67b8/edit?usp=sharing

### For Coordinators: Project Considerations

- Defer to your local BoH advisories and regulations. Check for updates regularly to ensure your compliance
- Use solo samplers or same-household teams
- Conduct training sessions online
- Use social distancing, no-contact protocols when passing off equipment, datasheets or lab samples
- Consider making cleaning supplies available to samplers: hand sanitizer, gloves, disinfecting wipes
- Supplement SOP documents with COVID recommendations
- Reconsider sampling sites which:
  - Are in high-traffic areas or tend to engage passers-by
  - Require samplers to park in State or other lots that may be closed
  - Require more samplers than you can safely assign to site
  - Are prone to raw sewage releases (CSOs)
- Assign individuals with specific equipment and tasks that will minimize equipment-sharing
- Contact funding sources to understand changes to your grant requirements (e.g. EPA grant info <u>here</u>)

## Before Leaving Home

- Always defer to your local Board of Health's advisories and regulations.
- If you or any member of your household is feeling unwell with COVID symptoms, do not sample
- Do not carpool with partners from outside your household
- Bring your own PPE
- Discuss any sampling concerns you may have with your coordinator
- Have a plan for parking, restrooms, meals, etc. that allows you to practice social distancing

#### In the Field

- If working with partners from outside of your household, maintain a 6-ft distance
- Wear PPE (cloth face mask, rubber gloves) when in public places and when working near individuals that are not from your household
- Wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer regularly
- Minimize equipment-sharing: stick to one task for the day if possible. If equipment must be shared, do not pass it hand-to-hand. Be especially mindful of writing instruments.
- Use disinfecting cloths or spray to wipe down sampling equipment prior to returning it, especially high-touch
  points like pencils, clipboards, and tote handles.
- Denote any temporarily modified practices used on data sheets and chain-of-custody paperwork
- If engaged by passers-by, maintain social distancing and refer questions to your coordinator

# In The Lab (or gear shed, or office)

- Staggered drop off of samples
- If possible, practice no-contact relay of equipment or samples with individuals already inside (be sure to disinfect first)!
- Disinfect laboratory equipment before and after use
- Limit number of staff in the lab at any time
- Consider ingress/egress that reduces contact

# Chime in!

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# Next steps

- Finalizing recommendations
- Sharing slides, video and recommendations
  - Email to participants, list servs
  - USA Volunteer Monitoring Network, Covid Page (<a href="http://volunteermonitoring.org/">http://volunteermonitoring.org/</a>)
  - MassBays website (<a href="https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-bays-national-estuary-partnership">https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-bays-national-estuary-partnership</a>)

# Thank You and Stay Well!

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