

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

You will be automatically muted

Ways to communicate

- Write comment in chatbox
- Speak up (write *** in chatbox to be called on)
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- Direct email to hosts
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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

- Ottawaquechee 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

Ottaquechee River Group





- 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 [here](#))

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 serves
 - USA Volunteer Monitoring Network, Covid Page (<http://volunteermonitoring.org/>)
 - MassBays website (<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-bays-national-estuary-partnership>)

Thank You and Stay Well!

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