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)
• Add to google sheet
• Direct email to hosts
  • kstepenu@uvm.edu
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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
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 [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 servs
  • 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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