



SAFE AND INCLUSIVE FIELDWORK GUIDANCE FOR GEOMECHANICS PROFESSIONALS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Field-based work for geomechanics professionals pose a range of physical and psychosocial hazards beyond the typical physical safety categories, which can be more impactful to women or gender diverse individuals. Managing such hazards with consideration of the diversity of individuals has a positive impact to all personnel completing such work.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

This document intends to inform and support geomechanics professionals and their colleagues in understanding and advocating for safe and inclusive field work conditions. Successful application of this guidance will see early identification of foreseeable physical and psychosocial hazards, followed by open discussion and implementation of practical controls that support all field personnel. This is a proactive approach, rather than a reactive response.

This document presents an overview of identified hazards followed by practical considerations and control measures based on the lived experiences women in the geomechanics profession. Their experience spans various industries and projects throughout Australia. Suggested control measures have been enacted in competitive professional services environments and are considered practicable and reasonable in many circumstances.

The guidance is provided for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal or professional advice.

1.2 REGULATIONS, LEGISLATION AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

Reference should be given to the relevant Workplace Health and Safety (WH&S) Act and Regulations, as well as associated codes of practice (such as SafeWork Australia) for each state and territory of Australia.

1.3 WH&S RESPONSIBILITIES

If you're a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), you have a duty to protect workers'/staffs' health and safety. This includes managing the risks associated with remote and isolated work. This includes:

- Providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety.
- Providing adequate and accessible facilities for the welfare of workers.
- Monitoring workers' health and safety and workplace conditions to prevent work-related illness and injury.
- Giving workers the necessary information, instruction, training, or supervision to do their job without risks to health and safety.
- Consulting with workers and WH&S representatives, about health and safety issues that may directly affect them.

If you are undertaking fieldwork, you have a duty to:

- Take reasonable care for your own health and safety while at work.
- Take reasonable care to not affect others' health and safety.
- Comply with reasonable instructions.
- Cooperate with reasonable policies and procedures.

1.4 ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Employers have a legal duty to provide reasonable accommodations - including changing how work is designed, managed, and organised. Engagement with personnel is critical to the process, however, asking direct questions about protected attributes under anti-discrimination laws (e.g. marital status, gender identity, caring responsibilities, medical conditions, etc.) may be unlawful. Instead, discussions should focus on the proposed project tasks and expectations. Ask whether there are any issues that could affect the person's ability to complete those tasks. Consider flexibility and reasonable accommodations to support personnel to complete the tasks safely.



2 GUIDANCE ON MANAGING HAZARDS

This section provides practical controls to manage physical and psychosocial hazards encountered during field-based geomechanics work, which are beyond the typical physical hazards.

These additional issues are associated with:

- Actual or perceived exposure to harassment, discrimination and violence risks (including sexual harassment).
- Gender-based discrimination or exclusionary behaviour resulting in bullying, harassment or assault.
- Bias or inequitable conditions resulting in less safe or less accessible conditions than colleagues.
- Lack of respect at work, including disrespectful conduct, unprofessional behaviour and microaggressions.

2.1 TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

2.1.1 Timing of travel

Consider the timing of travel, especially unsociable or non-daylight hours, as this may expose personnel to unlit, less trafficked or unknown areas with increased opportunity for assault.

At night, in remote or not well-known areas, travellers should first consider whether travel can be delayed or avoided until daylight hours. If late-night travel is necessary (and especially when travelling alone), taxis or rideshares should be considered instead of walking or using public transport.

2.1.2 Type of accommodation

Accommodation choice should consider:

- Location safety and proximity, generally in town and / or in a known area.
- Access to food and other necessities.
- Parking proximity and route to rooms including lighting / monitoring.
- Feedback on accommodation from other personnel / online reviews.
- Room privacy and security features (i.e. separate bathrooms, after hours keycard access, etc).
- Additional safety features (i.e. 24-hour reception desk or security).

Where accommodation is chosen close to site/office, consider the travel route, lighting, pedestrian activity/visibility, and parking situation.

Private accommodation for individual personnel is preferred (i.e. separate motel room with private bathroom).

During long term projects, **shared accommodation** (i.e. a multi-bedroom rented house with company personnel only) can provide socialising opportunities and support long-term mental health and cohesion for personnel working away from home. However, a discussion with each personnel around their comfort level should be had, and personnel should feel comfortable to 'opt-out'.

In planning shared accommodation, consideration should be given to:

- Segregated accommodation by gender, known personnel, or another metric as appropriate to the team needs
- Private bedrooms for all personnel.
- Segregated bathrooms (where not private) defined based on team needs (gender, specific personnel needs, etc).
- Hiring a cleaner on a regular (weekly) basis coordinated with personnel changeovers.

Shared accommodation with personnel outside the company (i.e. subcontractors, clients, etc) is not a preferred option.

Where **camp accommodation** is used:

- Consider camp layout and amenities (i.e. separate sleeping quarters for genders).
- Check on the history of harassment or other information about the camp.
- Provide personnel emergency contact details for camp managers and on-site security, should uncomfortable behaviour occur. Often camps will have 24-hour security that can escort workers (e.g. office to mess, mess to rooms) if personnel are uncomfortable walking alone.
- A discussion with personnel around their comfort level should be had, and personnel should feel comfortable to 'opt-out' either via alternative nearby accommodation (if available) or not being involved in the fieldworks

2.1.3 Remote or isolated travel



For remote areas or isolated sites, **more than one person** will provide an increased level of safety to manage the hazard of limited communications and emergency incidents. This additional person could include a client or subcontractor (i.e. driller), if appropriate.

Other control measures to be considered are:

- Clear communication and check-in protocols.
- Suitable equipment for communication within and outside site (e.g. mobile phone with confirmed coverage, satellite phone, Starlink, etc) including additional battery packs.
- Journey management plan describing route, estimated travel times, fuel stops, nominated safe stopping points and agreed escalation triggers if check-ins are missed.
- Share live location where practicable (e.g. phone location sharing / GPS tracking) and maintain a written record of last known location and expected return time.
- Pre-arranged safe meeting points and on-site contacts (client / contractor) and avoid isolated one-on-one meetings where practicable; ensure personnel can stop work and leave if they feel unsafe.

2.2 SITE CONDITIONS

2.2.1 Respect at work

The **Sex Discrimination and Fair Work (Respect at Work) Amendment Act (2021)** states that everyone has the right to feel safe and respected at work, and these matters should be treated seriously and confidentially.

Psychosocial hazards are work-related factors that could cause psychological harm and are associated with the design or management of work, the work environment, plant and equipment at the workplace, and workplace interactions or behaviours. WH&S obligations include managing psychosocial hazards.

Examples of how psychosocial hazard present in field work include:

- Role overload or demands on field work personnel.
- Working with others who are unfamiliar, display or have a history of unprofessional behaviour.
- Exposure to harassment, bullying, and discrimination.
- Remote, isolated, unsecure, or unsafe locations during travel, field work and during downtime.
- Lack of communication, including limited mobile phone reception or extended periods of field work.
- Poor workplace relationships or support to monitor wellbeing and escalate concerns.

Microaggressions are small actions or comments that can make the receiver feel less welcome, valued, or safe. Actions and comments may be subtle (tone, body language, interruptions) or more overt (dismissive remarks or assumptions), and their cumulative impact can affect wellbeing, job satisfaction and retention.

This type of behaviour can **escalate to bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination, or assault**, and is then considered unlawful conduct in accordance with the Fair Work Act (1984) and Respect at Work Amendment Act (2021). Such behaviour must be reported immediately. Australian Human Rights Commission, Fair Work Commission and police have power, and may need to be involved in investigations, disputes or criminal conduct.

Employers have a **legal duty to eliminate or minimise these hazards** as far as reasonably practicable. This involves changing how work is designed, managed, and organised to reduce stress-inducing factors. Some examples of control measures are:

- Develop a **safe, respectful and inclusive workplace culture** by:
 - Setting expectation that personnel behave in a **professional and courteous manner**.
 - Encouraging personnel to **speak up for themselves or as a bystander** about safety and wellbeing.
 - **Proactively responding** to harassment, bullying and discrimination in the workplace with clear reporting lines and processes, including supporting personnel who experience harassment or discrimination with an empathetic, person-centred approach.
- **Zero-tolerance for harassment and discrimination** from personnel, subcontractors and clients.
- **Clear policies and procedures** which are championed by leaders around equal opportunity, harassment, discrimination, Respect at Work, professional conduct, reporting and grievance handling.
- Providing **alternative ways of working** to facilitate safe working practices.

A brief and practical **respectful behaviours safety moment** (e.g. short safety share/toolbox talk or refresher) can support project leaders, office and field personnel to feel confident and supported to act early and appropriately by discussing:

- Recognising inappropriate behaviour (including discriminatory language or conduct framed as “banter”).



- Responsibility of those in authority to set expectations, intervene when safe, and protect affected personnel.
- Practical steps if something is observed (e.g. pause work if required, address behaviour directly if safe, support the impacted person, and seek assistance).
- How to document and escalate (e.g. contemporaneous notes, reporting pathways, and where relevant, formal communication with suppliers/contractors in line with organisational policies).

2.2.2 Amenities

In accordance with WH&S regulations, the **availability of site amenities (toilets) must be considered** in the planning of works. A lack of appropriate facilities leads to unsafe practices such as limiting fluid intake or taking an extended break from site to drive to a public bathroom.

In all instances, the arrangements should ensure field personnel can get through their day comfortably and without hygiene concerns. While a ‘bush wee’ is sometimes the only option available, it should not be the primary solution.

Considerations could be given to:

- **Onsite amenities**, where separated facilities are available (and site behaviour is consistent with this) and they are maintained to an appropriate level of cleanliness.
- **Public amenities**, pending accessibility and distance as well as safety of location and maintenance condition. This sometimes includes non-public amenities (i.e. fast-food or fuel station).
- **Temporary amenities** (i.e. portaloos, trailer mounted portaloos, camping toilets with tent, or similar). Temporary amenities can be low cost and can pay for themselves in reduced downtime. Options like a trailer can be moved around with the field team or placed at a central location onsite. Depending on the duration of works and personnel numbers, consideration should be given to dedicated segregated toilets, restocking and cleaning.
- Where other alternatives are not suitable, **clear protocol and expectations around ‘bush wee’** should be established (e.g. agreement on clear words when informing others of intentions, check-in protocols and disposal expectations).

Availability of **hand cleaning** amenities, **general waste bins** as well as **sanitary hygiene requirements** should be considered for all these options. Where facilities are not available (or restocking uncertain), alternatives could include provision of wet wipes and hand sanitiser, and a lidded bin for these items. Where **sanitary bins are not provided**, personnel should be informed to allow for alternative management to be considered.

2.3 PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

PPE should be **well-fitting and fit-for-purpose**. Gender-specific, maternity and inclusive PPE which is compliant with Australian Standards is commercially available. It should be communicated clearly to personnel that if the ‘standard’ kit is not well-fitting for their needs, they will be supported in acquiring appropriate alternatives.

Keep in mind:

- Sizing and fit vary between brands and trying multiple options may be necessary to find the best fit.
- Safety stores may carry a limited selection in-store, and ordering specific PPE may involve long lead times.
- Certain items, such as night-work compliant high visibility pants, may need to be made to order.
- Shared PPE (such as harnesses) should also be properly sized and the available size/s appropriate for the personnel trained and anticipated to complete the work.

2.4 MANUAL HANDLING

Personnel should not be **presumed less capable** of performing physical tasks based on gender, medical conditions (including pregnancy), physical size, background, etc. While strength may vary from person to person, there are different **methods and tools available to support physical tasks**.

Discussions with potential field personnel should include task requirements, personnel identifying any potential limitations, and working together to consider other control measures to ensure they can perform the work safely. While not all personnel will be capable of all manual handling tasks, and control measures to support all tasks may not be reasonably practicable, this should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Examples of controls measures include:

- Limiting weight in samples (i.e. using 4 out of 5 core rows, two x 10 kg bags for bulk sample, breaking down equipment).
- Vehicle type appropriate to personnel needs (i.e. high utility tray versus lower lift height into van).



- Equipment and methodology (i.e. use of utility tray to log, elevated logging table, wheeled cart, etc).
- Location and layout of storage, provision of mechanical assistance and team-lift opportunities.

2.5 WORKING HOURS

Fieldwork hours can present challenges around competing work and personal responsibilities – such as caring for others (children, elderly family, etc), medical appointments, etc. While flexible hours are not always possible, they should be considered and embraced to support inclusive participation in fieldwork.

Assumptions and direct questions around such responsibilities are discriminatory under the Sex Discrimination Act (1984). While others may be aware of some responsibilities, this should not predetermine whether the personnel are chosen for the fieldwork.

Instead, opportunities should be presented to personnel with early discussion focused on the project requirements (working hours, location and roster constraints) and potential field personnel should indicate what they can reasonably undertake. An agreed approach from here should challenge any restrictions that could be managed with flexible options to meet program needs and project constraints (e.g. staggered starts, split shifts, job sharing, additional resourcing).

Note: Formal childcare (i.e. daycare, before and after school care, etc) have defined hours (typically 7 am for 10-12 hours), with enrolled days not easily altered and penalties applicable for late pickups.

2.6 COMMUNICATION

2.6.1 During planning, travel and site works

Provision of a **company mobile** to field personnel, either ongoing or project basis, avoids the need to share personal mobile numbers, limiting access for potential unwanted communications and harassment.

Thorough **briefing of personnel**, especially those new to the role or project, will support their understanding and ability to implement controls.

Regular check-ins should be scheduled between an office-based colleague and field personnel during travel and fieldwork (e.g. departure/arrival and daily during works) via an agreed method (call/message) with escalation triggers. Check-ins support welfare, early identification of emerging concerns around personnel fatigue and wellbeing, safe reporting pathway for inappropriate or unsafe behaviour onsite and timely escalation if contact is missed.

Where a **report of concern** is made, the response should be prompt and the reporter kept regularly informed of progress. Supporting personnel may include removing the transgressor. The person raising the concern should not generally be considered for removal, unless the situation cannot be dealt with otherwise.

Onsite, personnel should be encouraged to **speak up for themselves and as a bystander**. If speaking up is unsafe, or backlash occurs, this should be reported immediately. Use of a **Stop Work Authority** may be appropriate to facilitate assessment of the issues and escalation (if required).

2.6.2 Feedback and continuous improvement

During planning, engage with personnel to understand the tasks, potential flexibility as well as their capacity is important to support diversity in the workplace. Personnel may hesitate to request adjustments for fear of it being difficult. Reinforce psychological safety and that reasonable needs are valid and support a diverse workforce.


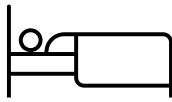



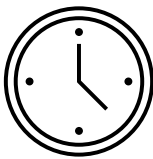

Provide clear ways for personnel to give feedback on fieldwork to improve future works (planning, scope, external parties, safety, quality, communication and behaviour).

2.7 WHY ARE THESE CONTROL MEASURES CONSIDERED REASONABLE

These controls address **foreseeable physical, safety and psychosocial hazards** at minimal cost relative to the work being undertaken. Suggested control measures are based on experience and have been enacted in competitive professional services environments and are considered practicable and reasonable in many circumstances. Additionally, they improve safety conditions for all personnel and support compliance with WH&S obligations.



**3 SUMMARY OF SAFE AND INCLUSIVE FIELDWORK GUIDANCE FOR
GEOMECHANICS PROFESSIONALS**

	<p>Plan travel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid non-daylight/unsociable travel • Use taxis/rideshares at night/in unfamiliar areas • Remote/isolated locations with >1 person and journey plan
	<p>Accommodation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select safe locations, with access to food/necessities • Prefer private accommodation • If shared, ensure opt-out and private bedrooms • Camps should have appropriate bathroom arrangements, regular cleaning, and security/escort contacts
	<p>Safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote/isolated work with >1 person • Pre-arrange safe meeting points/contacts • Use check-ins with escalation triggers and reliable comms • Avoid isolated one-on-one meetings • Enable stop work/leave if unsafe
	<p>Respect at work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set expectations for professional conduct • Zero tolerance for harassment/discrimination • Clear reporting pathways and prompt, person-centred response • Encourage speak-up / bystander action
	<p>Facilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan amenities so personnel can work hygienically • Maintain cleanliness, restocking and (where needed) segregation • Provide hand cleaning, waste bins and sanitary hygiene options • Set “bush wee” protocol if unavoidable
	<p>Working hours</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss task requirements early • Engage with personnel on capabilities and availability • Use flexible options where practicable
	<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company mobiles (where possible) • Brief personnel on controls and expectations • Schedule regular check-ins with escalation triggers • Respond promptly to reports • Encourage speaking up • Capture feedback and lessons learnt