



## The Rural Clinical School of Western Australia

# 2014 RCSWA COUNTRY DRIVING POLICY FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

### Background

One of the great opportunities we have when we live in the country is access to the bush, and the sense of freedom and adventure that comes with that. We get to know, and feel a growing connection, to place. Driving is an integral part of being able to access this opportunity and is a valued activity in the RCSWA.

However, country driving also is one of the riskiest things we undertake, and we need to recognise this aspect as well. Although many of us feel “bullet proof”, students and staff have already been involved in serious accidents, and we have lost friends and colleagues to crashes or tragedies in remote locations.

The University and the RCSWA have a duty of care to provide workplaces that are as free as practical from hazards and the risk of harm. Under new occupational health and safety legislation, there is a more clearly articulated partnership in responsibility between due diligence by senior management and reasonable care being taken by workers (which includes students). Criminal charges can result to either party if something occurs and these two aspects cannot be demonstrated. This commitment to health and safety is taken very seriously, and has significant implications on how all of us carry out our day-to-day work, and how we plan for activities that are more dangerous.

All organisations will be considering how best to meet these tighter health and safety obligations under the new legislation.

The RCSWA’s commitment to health and safety is wide reaching, and doesn’t just focus on driving (e.g. includes bullying in the workplace, suicide risk, violence against students, getting into trouble in local communities due to misunderstandings or alcohol). The RCSWA is responsible for the safety of students travel to and from site at the beginning and end of the year and for Options. The RCSWA is also responsible for study-related travel required as part of students’ curriculum (e.g. travel to sites for short rural GP placements or rural research units). However, once on site, students are considered at a “permanently staffed university location” and are responsible for their own health and safety during recreation and in their own time, even if they have utilised the site’s RCSWA vehicle to undertake the activity.



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### RCSWA Driving Policy – safe vehicle, safe drivers, safe journey

We want to continue to support driving in the country for those students and staff who wish to do it. Therefore we require all students and staff to take their responsibilities to safe driving seriously.

The RCSWA approach involves:

1. Our policy being congruent with UWA's Off Campus Driving Policy (available at <http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/driving>.)
2. An *Assessment of Country Driving Form* to be completed by all students and sent to site / rural placement coordinator for sign off, prior to the student leaving Perth.
3. Successful completion of the RCSWA funded Driving Course for all full year RCSWA students, prior to leaving Perth. A driving course has been organised for the Broome and Derby students in Broome within the first couple of weeks of arrival. These courses have 4WD and defensive driving techniques included.
4. A presentation from the Head of School (or representative) at orientation to highlight the RCSWA's expectations of staff and students.
5. A formal, site-based discussion on arrival between the new students and the Medical Coordinators and administration staff covering local driving hazards and risk management strategies and the 'Standard Operating Procedure' (SOP) for country driving in your region (attendance will be signed off). This discussion will occur at urban-based orientation sessions for students doing short rural placements.
6. Adherence to the RCSWA SOP for country driving in your region on all trips.
7. Completion of a Driving Plan for all trips that fall outside the SOP.
8. Intermittent reminders from site staff about road safety during the year.
9. Intermittent evaluation of the RCSWA approach.



For final year students going out to Rural GP Placements, for students doing rural research options and for students on electives, Point 3 above (i.e. relating to the driving course) does not apply.



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## Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for driving while in the RCSWA

There is a region specific SOP but, in summary, on EVERY trip, the RCSWA requires:

1. A safe vehicle
2. A safe driver
3. A safe journey plan

### 1. A safe vehicle

#### 1.1 RCSWA cars and 4WD

The RCSWA is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy, and appropriately fitted out. Additional equipment may be required in some sites (e.g. bull bar, tow bar, additional spare tyres, extra fuel capacity, cargo barriers, additional battery, upgraded tyre specifications, cruise control, additional communication equipment, survival kit, recovery equipment, extensive first aid kit, fire extinguisher). The RCSWA is required to make sure RCSWA vehicles are being used within their operational limits on all journeys, including recreation. All RCSWA vehicles are covered by a roadside assistance programme (RAC).

#### 1.2 Private vehicles

The owner is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy, and appropriately fitted out. The RCSWA makes an assessment 'on paper' of any cars brought to site in the "Assessment of Country Driving" formed filled in prior to orientation.

#### 1.3 Condition and equipment for all vehicles

All vehicles leaving the town boundary must be in good – excellent mechanical condition and must have:

- Good – excellent tyres
- A spare tyre
- 5L water/person / day, including some in a container that can be carried with you if you need to leave the vehicle
- Maps/navigation aid
- Appropriate communication device (e.g. mobile phone and charger, sat phone, EPIRB, SPOT, radio)
- A toolkit for the car, including a working jack
- First aid kit
- A blanket
- A roadside assist programme (e.g. RAC = ~ \$113 per year per car)



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### 1.4 Pre-travel vehicle check

Before every trip, ensure the vehicle is fit for the journey (general visual inspection, checking oil and water levels and ensuring that adequate fuel is carried).

Complete the Vehicle Inspection Checklist prior to departure.

### 1.5 Motorbikes

Students are not permitted to travel by motorbike while on RCSWA-related journeys.

## 2. A safe driver

### 2.1 Licence, traffic regulations and seat belt

As with all drivers, staff and students must have a valid driver's licence and adhere to all traffic regulations. Always wear a seat belt.

### 2.2 Preparing for travel on country and remote roads

- All full year RCSWA students must pass the pre-RCSWA Driving course.
- All students and staff must complete an *Assessment of Country Driving Experience* form when commencing with the RCSWA or an RCSWA-coordinated rural placement. This form will be reviewed and signed off by the lead MC / administrator in each site / rural placement coordinator. If areas of concern are noted, these will be discussed and an individual plan created to address concerns.
- A discussion about driving risks and safety tips specific in the region will occur during orientation activities.

### 2.3 Exclusions

No RCSWA staff or student can drive if:

- Tired
- Under the influence of alcohol or other drugs





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### 3. A safe journey plan

- All driving when in the RCSWA must adhere to the safe vehicle, safe driver, safe journey plan policy documented above, and adhere to the region – specific SOP. Always get up-to-date information about road and weather conditions (e.g. from shire offices). Intermittently UWA will send out email warnings and these must be followed.
- Any journey in a RCSWA vehicle must have the logbook completed.
- The UWA policy on off campus driving has information on a safe journey and is available at <http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/driving>.

#### 3.1 Requirement for a driving plan

A 'Driving plan' must be completed by the driver for both legs of the journey, and assessed and signed off by the lead MC / administrator at site / rural placement coordinator for all trips that occur outside of the regional SOP.

#### 3.2 Reasons for a driving plan may include:

- Unusually long journeys OR
- Travel to higher risk areas (e.g. particularly bad roads or very remote / isolated areas) OR
- A noted safety risk (e.g. extreme weather, floods, bushfire).

#### 3.3 The driving plan involves:

- Description of the travel schedule
- Names of driver and travelling companions
- Nominating the RCSWA staff member who will be notified of departure and arrival
- A risk management plan.

#### 3.4 Steps in risk management

There are four steps in risk management:

1. Identify risks (find out what could cause harm);
2. Assess risks (understand the likelihood of a hazard causing harm and how serious it could be);
3. Control risks (implement the most effective control measure that is reasonably practical in the circumstances);
4. Review control measures to ensure they are working as planned.





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Risks that may be considered include gravel roads, road trains, animals on the road, an accident, an injury / illness along the way, vehicle failure, getting lost and failed communication.

There are good tips about how to reduce the risk on gravel roads and from road trains on the RAC website under “country driving” <http://rac.com.au/About-Us/Community/Road-safety/Safe-drivers/Country-driving.aspx>.

Safe communications around a journey may require thinking about mobile phone cover in your area and whether another device is required (e.g. sat phone, UHF radio, SPOT, GPS tracking device). Always call in to the nominated person in your driving plan when you are leaving and on your safe arrival.

In the event of a motor vehicle incident:

- You must advise Rhonda Worthington at the Kalgoorlie office as soon as possible after the accident.
- You will be required to complete a UWA Incident Report Form within 24 hours of the incident.
- You will be encouraged to attend counselling from the University’s Employee Assistance Programme if you are involved in a motor vehicle incident

Refer to your local site administrative officer to check which forms will require completion prior to travel.



All Driving Plans must be submitted for approval to a local MC / administrator with at least 48 hours’ notice.

### Travel to sites for the RCSWA full year students

The RCSWA policy about travel to and from sites at the start and end of the year and to and from Options is that:

- Northern sites (Carnarvon and north) – must fly (private vehicles can be transported to site at RCSWA expense).
- Bunbury, Busselton, Northam and Narrogin – students are expected to drive.
- Other southern sites and Kalgoorlie – can drive, take train / bus or fly dependent on the staff / student’s preference and an adequate assessment of country driving experience (private vehicles can be transported to site at RCSWA expense).



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Any plans to travel outside of these rules can only occur at the discretion of the Head of School and will require a *Driving Plan* form to be completed.



For final year students going out to Rural GP Placements, travel is organised by the Kalgoorlie office of the RCSWA and may also include bus / train travel. Other travel (e.g. for research / elective students) must be discussed with the organising site.

### Injuries and accidents

All injuries and incidents must be reported to the lead MC / administrator at your site as soon as possible.

A UWA form may be required and is available at [www.safety.uwa.edu.au/forms/incident](http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/forms/incident)

### Not adhering to policy

The RCSWA takes this policy very seriously and expects full compliance at all times. Failure to comply will put both the individual concerned and the RCSWA at risk of facing criminal charges without support or defence by UWA in the event of a serious accident. The Head of School will be informed of any breaches in policy. Breaches may constitute failure in Professional Behaviour and therefore failure of the RMED unit.

### Evaluation of the impact of this policy and compliance

The RCSWA needs to be sure that this policy is what 'happens on the ground'. There will be intermittent auditing done through checklists, self-auditing, review of incidents and feedback from staff and students.

Please feel free to provide comment on this policy through the student representative.

The policy will be reviewed every two years, or if required after any significant audit findings, incident or feedback.



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## Consultation

This policy has been prepared in consultation with:

- RCSWA staff
- Jaimie Drysdale (the 2012 RCSWA student rep)
- Lee Fairhead (the 2012 RCSWA student rep)
- Kim Heitman (General Counsel, The University of Western Australia)
- Lyall Munslow-Davies (UWA Safety and Health)

## References



1. UWA policies:
  - a. <http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/driving>
  - b. <http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/field-work-remote>
2. <http://rac.com.au/About-Us/Community/Road-safety/Safe-drivers/Country-driving.aspx> Accessed 27/11/2012
3. WACHS Safe Driving Guideline 2010
4. National Guidelines for working alone or in a remote locality (Commonwealth Safety Management Forum)

## Contact details for UWA's General Counsel if required



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## Associated documents and forms



1. *Assessment Of Country Driving Experience* form
2. Region-specific Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for country driving
3. Driving Plan

## Questions about this policy



Please address questions to site staff / Rhonda Worthington  
([rhonda.worthington@rcswa.edu.au](mailto:rhonda.worthington@rcswa.edu.au))