



The Rural Clinical School of Western Australia

DRIVING IN THE KIMBERLEY

Current as at 23rd January 2014

Welcome to Broome

One of the great opportunities we have when we live in the Kimberley is access to the bush, unsealed roads, magnificent scenery 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.

Unfortunately driving is also the single riskiest regular activity in the Kimberley. A number of students and staff over the past decade have hit cattle or lost control on an unsealed road in the north of the State, causing considerable damage. Elsewhere in the state RCS staff and students have lost friends or colleagues to crashes.

This policy must be adhered to for all trips while in the RCSWA, and read in conjunction with the RCSWA driving policy and the 2 relevant UWA policies:

<http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/driving>

<http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/field-work-remote>

On EVERY trip, the RCSWA requires:

- **A safe vehicle**
- **A safe driver**
- **A safe journey plan**

A safe vehicle:

RCSWA cars and 4WD:

The RCSWA is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy, and appropriately fitted out. The driver is responsible for checking tyres, oil, water and noting any change in condition that may indicate a problem. If you note any concerns relating to the safety of an RCS vehicle please contact your local administrative person as soon as possible. All RCSWA vehicles are covered by a roadside assist programme (RAC).

Private vehicles:

The owner is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy, and appropriately fitted out.

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

- Good tyres

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- A roadworthy spare tyre (2 if going long distances on unsealed roads)
- 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
- Communication device (e.g. mobile phone and charger)
- A toolkit for the car, including a working jack
- Small first aid kit
- A blanket

Pre-travel vehicle check:

Before every trip, ensure the vehicle is fit for the journey (by visual inspection, checking gauges, checking oil, water and tyres).

A safe driver:

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.

Obey all road signs! In particular temporary signs such as 'road closed' or signs related to dangers ahead.

Preparing for travel on country and remote roads:

- All 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. This form will be reviewed and signed off by the lead MC / administrator in each site. If areas of concern are noted, these will be discussed and an individual plan created to address concerns.
- Each site will have a discussion about driving risks and safety tips specific to the region in orientation week.

No RCSWA staff or student is permitted to drive if:

- Tired
- Under the influence of alcohol or other drugs

A safe journey plan:

Staff and students need to be aware of the conditions they are heading into, aware of the risks they may face in their year in the Kimberley and to take appropriate steps to minimise these risks.

This includes for regular journeys (for example car travel Broome – Derby, regular trips on the Dampier Peninsula or Bidyadanga for clinical work) and other journeys which may be part of the Kimberley experience or related to RCSWA requirements.

Some general points when travelling remotely:

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- Find out about culturally sensitive locations before you go. Obey signs when you get there and check with locals to make sure you do the right thing.
- Leave gates as you find them – if closed then close them behind you, if left open then leave open.
- Don't stay around bores/gates/windmills/tanks or cattle yards without landholders permission.

See attached documents for risks that may be faced, regular driving plans and personalised driving plans for other long journeys.

Risks when driving in the Kimberley

Risk	Relevant information / measures
Unsealed roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow down - reduce your speed to suit the conditions. There is less traction on gravel roads and it is easier to lose control, compared to driving on a bitumen surface.• Engaging 4 wheel drive when driving on unsealed roads improves traction and provides more control.• If traffic signs warn of a gravel road ahead, slow down while still on the bitumen.• On unsealed roads follow tyre tracks wherever possible - this will provide firmer ground. Keep away from the loose sand or gravel on the edge of the road – may get bogged or lose control.• Slow down for corrugations.• Slow down more for corners – loose surface reduces traction – very easy to lose control.• ABS will work differently on gravel and may increase your braking distance. If you have to brake heavily be aware of the difference in the braking sensation of ABS.• Consider using a lower gear when driving to assist with braking.• Avoid sudden braking or change of direction – risks loss of control.• Watch for dust ahead - oncoming vehicle, or coming up behind a vehicle - headlights on low beam when driving in dust.• Slow right down and keep left on the approach to blind corners and crests – other drivers may not be careful on roads used less often.
Damaged roads and other hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drive slowly and especially carefully after heavy rain as wash outs and large holes can appear unexpectedly.• Be careful of deep tyre tracks and ruts from heavy use of unsealed roads/tracks• Tracks that cross tidal areas may not be passable during and for days after periods of high tides.• Do not drive below the high tide mark on beaches - 4WDs become bogged and then covered in salt water and written off every year on beaches around Broome.

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Road trains (up to 53m long)	<p>Road trains require considerable stopping/breaking distance, need extra room on the road and are sometimes slow moving.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be patient.• Do not attempt to overtake near junctions - road trains may require two lanes in order to turn.• Ensure the road ahead is clear when overtaking.• If overtaking, overtake quickly; don't hesitate.• Make allowances for the wind buffeting your car as you pass.• If approaching a road train from the opposite direction slow down and keep left to allow the road train to remain on the bitumen.• If a wide road train you may need to slow to a crawl and pull on to the gravel verge.• Do not pull out onto a road when a road train is approaching.
Narrow bitumen roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The sealed surfaces on some roads in the Kimberley are narrow. Sometimes it is necessary to move onto the gravel verge to avoid on-coming vehicles. This can be very dangerous – it is easy to lose control or roll the vehicle. Slow to walking pace before leaving the sealed section with one set of wheels.• Do not pass vehicles on narrow roads where you need to have 2 wheels off the sealed surface to do so.
Animals on the road (stock and wildlife)	<p>Kimberley roads are generally unfenced. Cattle are common and can be very hard to see. Kangaroos can appear very suddenly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• RCSWA vehicles are not to be driven outside of towns in the north of WA between dusk / dawn – any breach of this rule will be treated very seriously.• Don't swerve to miss an animal - you may lose control of the vehicle. Slow down as much as possible and stop, if necessary, until the road is clear. Better to hit the animal if you can't stop than to kill yourself or your passengers.
Travelling on remote roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always let someone know where you are going and anticipated arrival time. (call or text immediately when you get to your destination)• Carry appropriate recovery gear, plenty of water and also food (if something goes wrong you can be stuck for long periods in remote locations)
Extremes of weather (eg heat, floods, cyclones)	<p>Cyclones: November to end of April (the last big cyclone in Broome was late April)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the information about cyclones at: http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/safetyinformation/cyclone/CycloneManualsandGuides/FESA_Cyclone-CycloneSmart.pdf• Check the local forecast, weather and cyclone warnings from the Bureau of Meteorological site www.bom.gov.au . The weather bureau provides the following:

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Tropical cyclone information bulletin - Issued when a cyclone is active in the Australian region, but is not expected to impact land-based communities within 48 hours.○ Tropical cyclone watch - Issued if a cyclone is expected to affect coastal communities within 48 hours, but not expected within 24 hours.○ Tropical cyclone warning - Issued if a cyclone is affecting or is expected to affect coastal communities within 24 hours. <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Check for road closures at http://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au and contact your local shire on the phone numbers on this site for up to date information on local roads. <p>Flood waters on road /track:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Never drive into floodwaters, or creeks without first ascertaining that it is safe to do so.● Depth, rate of flow, what surface you are crossing and your vehicle (4WD, 2WD) are all important when deciding whether to cross.● Check for danger – crocodiles are not just in salt water!● Floodways on most roads have depth indicators● Check depth, flow rate (floating debris, logs etc) and surface/pot holes/obstacles – walk the road if necessary but take care. Observe other vehicles if they are crossing.● If it is not safe to walk across easily it is probably not safe to drive.● If not sure don't attempt to cross, either go or sit and wait for the water to go down.● If safe to cross - Engage low gear and drive in that gear (don't change gears while crossing water). <p>Heavy Rain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Slow down or stop, lights on low beam, wipers on high speed.● May cause flash flooding – watch for water on road <p>IMPORTANT - Once safely across even shallow water touch the brake pedal a few times to dry out brakes.</p>
Bushfire	Fires move fast and are unpredictable: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ensure headlights are on low beam.● Wind up windows, engage the recycle option for air conditioning.● Follow advice of police or fire-fighters if present.● Remain away from the fire until safe to pass through.● Smoke can obscure oncoming vehicles so drive with care.
Driving into the sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Plan your trip to avoid driving into the sun if possible.● Wear sun glasses● Slow down as visibility may be impaired● Put your lights on to low beam● Make sure your windscreen is clean.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take extreme care if you have to overtake, and with animals crossing the road due to reduced visibility.• If necessary stop until the sun has gone down sufficiently so that it is safe to resume driving.
Breaking down / Flat Tyre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you break down, STAY with your vehicle. It will be your shelter/security and a point to find you as it is easier to find than you are if a search is needed.• Do not attempt to open a radiator of a vehicle to check for water if the engine is hot. Leave for several hours to cool before opening.• Take care when changing flat tyres that your vehicle is on a stable base.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Engine turned off and passengers out of vehicle.○ Hand brake on and car in gear (or Park for automatic).○ Put a block/rock behind and in front of other wheels.○ Loosen the nuts of flat wheel before jacking up.○ Have the spare wheel ready to put on before jacking up car.○ Make sure jack is in correct position so that it can't slip.• Re-tighten wheel nuts once jack is let down, and re-check at 50 km.
No mobile coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the Kimberley it is common not to have mobile coverage. Telstra has clearly the best coverage and has some remote coverage (but still large gaps. Have a Telstra phone with you.• Think about whether another device is required (e.g. sat phone, UHF radio, GPS tracking device)
Injury / illness on the road	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure everyone (not just the injured) is protected from the elements, rig up shade or rain cover and provide water.• Hot ground/roads can cause burns to people laying on the ground – ensure injured people are on a safe surface.• Use mobile or satellite phone if there is coverage. Coverage may be better on a hill. Activate EPIRB if available.• <u>If there is no satellite or mobile coverage</u> and there is more than one vehicle travelling send someone to nearest station/settlement with information of distance, (location) number of injured or people involved• If there is no coverage and you have let someone know the time of your arrival then be prepared to wait.
Long trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't drive more than 10 hours per day• Don't drive when you are tired• Share driving with others• Plan a stop at least every three hours for 20 minutes.• Don't plan to drive after a day's work.• Plan to have a good night's sleep before you go.

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