



The Rural Clinical School
of Western Australia

NORTHAM STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR COUNTRY DRIVING IN THE WHEATBELT

Current as at the 23rd January 2018

Background

Welcome to Northam.

One of the great opportunities we have when we live in Northam 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.

This SOP must be adhered to for all trips while in the RCSWA, and read in conjunction with the RCSWA driving policy and the two 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:

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 – excellent mechanical condition and must have:

- Good – excellent tyres
- A spare tyre

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- 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
- A roadside assist programme (e.g. RAC = ~ \$113 per year per car).

Pre-travel vehicle check:

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

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.

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 in the region in orientation week.
- Driving risks and safety tips for the region will be discussed during Northam Orientation week.

No RCSWA staff or student can drive if:

- Tired
- Under the influence of alcohol or other drugs



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A Safe Journey Plan:

A Driving Plan must be completed for all journeys (private travel and RCSWA travel) not listed below;

- Northam/Kalgoorlie/Northam via Highway
- Northam/Midland/Perth/Northam via Highway
- Northam/Dowerin/Northam via Highway
- Northam/Narrogin/Northam via Highway
- Northam/Toodyay/Northam via Highway
- Northam/Wongan Hills/Northam via Highway
- Northam/York/Northam via York Road

The driving plan form needs to be completed and handed to your lead MC/site administrator and signed off prior to commencing your journey.

- **Be visible** – always drive with your headlights on
outside the town boundary
- **Stop and look** at rail crossings without lights. A loaded train travelling at 50km hour needs up to 1.6km to stop
- **Check** oil, water, windscreen washer reservoir and wiper blades before departure
- **Grasshopper plagues** occur frequently. If your route is through a grasshopper infestation area cable tie some shade cloth in front of your radiator grille
- **Take a break** every couple of hours. Get out of the car and walk around for ten minutes.

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Mobile Phone

Whilst driving, you can only touch a mobile phone to receive and terminate a phone call if the phone is secured in a mounting allowed to the vehicle. If the phone is not secured in a mounting, it can only be used to receive or terminate a phone call without touching it (e.g. using voice activation, a Bluetooth hands-free car kit, ear piece or headset).

Whilst driving, it is illegal to create, send or look at a text message, video message, email or similar communication, even when the phone is secured in a mounting or can be operated without touching it.

GPS may be used by a driver whilst driving if no touch of the keypad or screen is required.

Penalties

3 Demerit Points and \$400.00 Fine

Remember: Legal use of mobile phones can also be distracting. Consider if it is important and the demands of the traffic before using your mobile. The safest option is often to wait until you are parked out of the line of traffic.





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Particular risks in our region include:

Risk	Relevant information / measures
Gravel roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow down and 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.• If traffic signs warn of a gravel road ahead, slow down while you are still on the bitumen.• Follow tyre tracks wherever possible - this will provide firmer ground. Keep away from the loose gravel on the edge of the road, it could pull you off the road and may cause your vehicle to roll over.• Slow down for corrugations - the old adage about speeding up to travel over the top may appear to work for small corrugations, but you could lose traction. When corrugations get severe you may lose control of the vehicle.• Watch out for the slope or camber of the road on corners - it could be sloping in the wrong direction and cause you to skid off the road if you are travelling too fast.• 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. It will give you better control and enable you to use the engine as a brake rather than relying on the brakes.• Try to steer and brake as smoothly as possible - jerky or sudden braking or steering will increase the risk of your vehicle skidding.• Watch out for dust ahead. It could be a sign of an oncoming vehicle, or it could signify that you are coming up behind a vehicle - switch your headlights to low beam when driving in dust.• Slow down and keep left on the approach to blind corners and crests - if you meet an oncoming vehicle it may be difficult to avoid a collision.
Poorly maintained roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Washed out due to heavy rains.• Roads in the Wheatbelt can have deep water on them especially in winter. Drive defensively in these adverse conditions.• Heavy use of local vehicles on unsealed roads (deep

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	<p>tyre tracks and ruts) Do not attempt to drive on salt lakes. Your car will become impossibly bogged and it will cost upwards of \$500 for a tow truck to remove your car from the lake.</p>
Road trains (up to 53m long)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the road ahead is clear when overtaking.• Overtake quickly; don't hesitate.• Allow the road train plenty of room to brake and manoeuvre.• Make allowances for the wind buffeting your car as you pass.• Allow the road train to remain on the bitumen, if the road is narrow. This will minimize flying debris from the many wheels of the larger vehicle and reduce dust.• Be patient.• Do not pull out onto a road when a road train is approaching.• Road trains require a great stopping/breaking distance.• Do not stop on narrow sections of road.• Do not overtake near junctions - road trains may require two lanes in order to turn.• If a road train is approaching from the opposite direction and the road is narrow, pull over off the bitumen if necessary & allow as much room as possible.• If you have a CB radio in your car, let the driver of the road train know that you are behind & wish to overtake.• The driver will tell you / or indicate when it is safe to do so.
Animals on the road (stock and wildlife)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't drive at dawn / dusk.• Don't drive at night.• Don't swerve to miss an animal - you may lose control of the vehicle & you can't predict which way the animal will go. Slow down as much as possible & stop, if necessary, until the road is clear. If you cannot avoid a large animal try to collide with them on the side fenders rather than head on.• Kangaroos, emus, sheep and cattle can appear from nowhere.
Travelling on remote roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most roads in the Wheatbelt are not isolated but if you go to remote locations be sure to inform someone when you go and again when you get back.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mobile reception can be a problem in the Wheatbelt. Make sure you have appropriate communications with you.
Extremes of weather (e.g. heat, rain, cold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get up-to-date information about road and weather conditions. Intermittently UWA will send out email warnings and these must be followed.• You can get them from the Bureau of Meteorological site www.bom.wa.au
Breaking down	<p>Let someone know where you are going and when you are expected back.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stay with your vehicle, don't leave it to walk for help as it is your shelter and easy for searchers to see.• Do not attempt to open the radiator of a vehicle to check for water if the engine is hot. Leave for several hours to cool as it will be scalding hot.• Take care when changing flat tyres that your vehicle is on a stable base; Engine must be turned off; Passengers out of vehicle; Hand brake on and gear lever engaged. Put a block/rock behind and in front of wheels that are not on flat ground.• Loosen the nuts of flat wheel before jacking up.• Have the spare wheel ready for putting on before jacking up car.• Make sure jack is in correct position so that it can't slip.• Make sure nuts are tight, stop and check them again after about 50 km.
Lost signal on mobile	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think about mobile phone cover in your area and whether another device is required (e.g. sat phone, UHF radio, GPS tracking device)• In the Wheatbelt, the best coverage is Telstra.
Bushfire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be particularly careful entering smoke across the Road. Put your lights on low beam, keep to the left, and drive very slowly.• Wind up windows, engage recycle option for air.• Anticipate that there may be fire-fighting appliances across the road or in the road.

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Floods	<p>If a river or stream is swollen by heavy rains do not drive into it unless you have checked the depth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Never drive into flood waters or creeks without first ascertaining that it is safe to do so. If not sure don't attempt to cross. Either go back to where you have come from or sit and wait, until the waters go down.• Check for depth of water - depth indicators show level.• Check for wash out areas. Walk the road if necessary but take care.• Be careful of floating logs and debris and the speed of the water flow.• If safe to cross engage low gear and drive in that gear (don't change while crossing water).• Once safely across touch the brake pedal a few times to dry out brakes.
Injury / illness on the road	<p>If you are involved in an accident, or stop to help at an accident be sure to avoid further accidents by sending some one back to caution approaching drivers. Put on your hazard warning lights.</p>
Journeys outside this SOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you intend travelling more than five hours you must have a driving plan which you discuss with a coordinator. This is obligatory.• Do not go onto land that is known to be sacred / obey cultural sensitivity.• Leave gates as you find them (open or closed)
Night driving	<p>Night driving is not allowed on RCSWA required journeys.</p>
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.

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Driving into the Sun, Fog, Insects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you cannot see you cannot drive. It may require you to stop driving and stay off the road until conditions improve.• Make sure your windscreen is clean.• If you must drive into the sun wear adequate sun glasses.• Keep your speed down as visibility can be impaired.• Put your lights on to low beam.• Plan to take breaks to alleviate fatigue.• Make sure your windscreen is clean and washer reservoir is full. Bug Off and newspaper/cloth are handy• Take extreme care if you have to overtake, there may be a vehicle coming toward you that you cannot see due to sun in your eyes.• Be alert to wildlife as animals may be hard to see due to sun glare.• If visibility is poor due to fog, rising or setting sun, stop the vehicle safely off the road and wait till visibility improves.
Fatigue	If you have had a late night or have been involved in surgery or obstetrics late at night do not drive until you are fully refreshed. If you feel remotely sleepy stop off the road and have a nap. It is on balance safer to do this than carry on driving.
Loose objects	Loose objects, bottles etc represent a significant hazard in vehicles during an accident. Carry your junk in the boot.

