NORTHAM STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP)
FOR COUNTRY DRIVING IN THE WHEATBELT
Current as at the 18th November 2013

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:

RCSWA cars and 4WD’s
The RCSWA is responsible for ensuring all RCSWA vehicles are roadworthy, 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). 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 – 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
- 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.

**No RCSWA staff or student can drive if:**
A safe journey plan:

Particular risks in our region include:

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<th>Gravel roads</th>
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<td>- Tired</td>
<td>- 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.</td>
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<td>- Under the influence of alcohol or other drugs</td>
<td>- If traffic signs warn of a gravel road ahead, slow down while you are still on the bitumen.</td>
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<td>- 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.</td>
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- Heavy use of local vehicles on unsealed roads (deep tyre tracks and ruts)

| Road trains (up to 53m long) | - Ensure the road ahead is clear when overtaking.  
- Overtake quickly; don't hesitate.  
- Allow the road train plenty of room to brake and maneuver.  
- 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) | - 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 | - 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.  
- 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)

- 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](http://www.bom.wa.au)

### Breaking down

Letting someone know where you are going and when you are expected back

### Lost signal on mobile

- 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

- 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

### Floods

If a river or stream is swollen by heavy rains do not drive into it unless you have checked the depth.

### Injury / illness on the road

If you are involved in an accident, or stop to help at an accident be sure to avoid further accidents by sending someone back to caution approaching drivers. Put on your hazard warning lights.

### Journeys outside this SOP

- 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

Night driving is not allowed on RCSWA required journeys.

### Long trips

- 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 | • 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. |
| 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. |