

School of Earth and Ocean Sciences

COVID-19 Expectations of Personal Conduct

updated 19 June 2020

Research labs are beginning to reopen in the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, but with COVID-19 related restrictions in place that will significantly impact working conditions. Our ability to work safely and respectfully under these new conditions will directly affect workplace atmosphere and morale. It will also determine whether our labs are allowed to remain open, and affect our ability to teach and mentor students. Hence, creating a respectful, courteous, and physically-safe environment is important for both personal and professional reasons.

This document outlines our collective expectations for behaviour in SEOS to provide a safe and supportive working environment in the School. SEOS faculty, staff, research personnel, and students are expected to abide by these guidelines in all interactions, in person or online. Note that this document does not cover operational safety aspects.

Here are some things to keep in mind during our interactions with each other.

1. **Personal safety:** The COVID-19 safety precautions are necessary so that we are not infected by the virus, and so that we do not inadvertently infect others. We may not know who is immunocompromised or may be in close contact with immunocompromised people.
2. **Respect:** Be kind to and considerate of each other. Although we are all affected by COVID-19, we are not all affected in the same way, and everyone has a different response to the situation. We are a multicultural group and each home country is facing different challenges with COVID-19. Your colleagues may be worried about higher-risk family members or about the situation in other places.
3. **Risk.** Risky behaviour is never acceptable and puts yourself and others at risk. Not only do we need to adopt safety practices to mitigate risks, we need to be sensitive to *perceived* risks. People's perceptions of risk differ based on their background, personal experiences, temperament, etc. For instance, while regulations require us to keep at least 2 metres apart, some people might need greater separation to feel safe. Or we might be unaware that two or more people live in the same household or are part of the same social bubble, and hence incorrectly perceive them as engaging in risky behaviour.
4. **Communication.** Now is the time to communicate clearly with one another, to check in about what makes people comfortable or uncomfortable, and to actively practice consent with others so that everyone feels safe and supported in their workspace.

5. **Discrimination and harassment.** Since the pandemic began, discrimination and harassment have increased, particularly targeting Asian people. Discrimination and harassment are never acceptable. This includes micro-aggressions, such as comments that wrongly imply that particular racial or ethnic groups are more susceptible to viruses or are spreading the disease more than others. Behaviour that minimizes the concerns of others or jokes about people who obey prescribed safety procedures are also not acceptable.
6. **Stress.** We are living in highly stressful times. The impacts of the pandemic are wide-ranging and often unseen. It may be particularly difficult for those living alone; those taking care of young children, elderly parents, or family members at risk; and those who have been racialized or are facing economic insecurity. One way to avoid further stressing others is to practice empathy and patience in all interactions.

How can you help communicate these expectations to others? If you feel co-workers are not being respectful, or you perceive that they are engaging in risky behaviour, there are different approaches you can take. If you are comfortable doing so, it is often best to address issues directly, but politely. In addition, there are reporting procedures available in SEOS (e.g., Director or AO). If things feel extremely uncomfortable or unsafe, you have additional options such as contacting Campus Security, Human Resources, or Equity and Human Rights, among others.

Given that it can be difficult to bring up concerns with co-workers, here are a few suggestions on how to start those conversations.

1. Would it be OK with you to have a conversation about physical distancing and the safety precautions adopted by SEOS?
2. You're standing closer than I feel comfortable with—would you mind taking a step back?
3. Thanks for cleaning up the equipment before it's my turn to use it. Can I double check whether you cleaned the benchtop too?
4. I need to reach the shelf above you. Can I ask you to move to one side briefly so that I can get access without being too close to you?
5. How are things for you? How have things been affecting you? I just thought I would check in to see if you are OK? I know everyone is impacted differently!