



Volunteer River Monitoring Program Safety Issues and Tips

Working in or around streams generally is not dangerous; however, accidents can happen. The use of common sense is always the best safety precaution. Additionally, follow these recommended tips to have a safe and enjoyable experience. **YOUR SAFETY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN COLLECTING A SAMPLE!**

- **Work in teams** -- Avoid working alone around water. Children should always be accompanied by watchful adults.
- **Notify friends or family members** – Tell somebody you know where you will be and when you expect to return. Carry a cell phone, if available.
- **Avoid working in streams during stormy weather or high water** – Danger increases as water levels and speeds rise. Try to stay in shallow areas. If it is specifically required by your action plan to sample during a storm, work in teams and exercise extreme caution.
- **Avoid being outside when lightning is nearby** – Avoid water, high ground, and open spaces if lightning is nearby. Avoid all metal objects including extension poles, electric wires, fences, machinery, motors, power tools, etc. If you are outside and lightning is nearby avoid areas underneath canopies, partially-open or small picnic or rain shelters, or near trees. Where possible, find shelter in a substantial building or in a fully enclosed metal vehicle such as a car, truck or a van with the windows completely shut. For more complete information, visit: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/outdoors.htm>.
- **Be wise with water contact** – During and after sample collection, keep hands away from eye and mouth areas. Always wash hands with soap and clean water after sampling. Never eat after sampling until hands have been washed. Wear disposable gloves and rubber boots, especially if the stream is likely to be polluted. If there is any concern that the stream may be severely polluted, consult with local health authorities or natural resource agencies for specific warnings or guidance.
- **Avoid dangerous objects** – Avoid objects with signs of biohazard or contamination. Be watchful for sharp objects such as broken glass. Do not pick up suspicious objects or stick hands in crevices.
- **Be aware of hazards** –
 - Be careful around traffic (wear bright orange clothing or safety vests if working in or near streets and/or bridges).
 - Protect your eyes by watching out for protruding tree branches.
 - Avoid sampling at areas having high or steep stream banks.
 - Do not enter water that goes above your hips.
 - Do not enter water if there is any concern for one's safety (e.g. high, fast flows).
 - Be careful walking on slippery surfaces such as streambanks and stream bottoms.
 - Dress appropriately for field conditions.
 - Wear an appropriate personal floatation device when working in or near water and especially when working in boats.
- **Avoid working in areas where hunting may be taking place** – Wear two articles of bright orange clothing (hat, vest, etc.) if you are unsure whether hunting is taking place near your stream monitoring sites.
- **Be prepared for first aid** – Know the location of a nearby phone in case of emergency and always bring a first-aid kit containing antiseptic, bandages, etc.
- **Don't lift too much** – If lifting objects into or out of the stream, use proper body mechanics (bend your knees, etc.) and lift only comfortable weights.
- **Be careful around animals and plants** – Avoid unfamiliar animals. Do not intrude on animal homes. Learn to identify poisonous plants, especially poison ivy, and be aware of your sensitivity to them. Try to avoid trampling a lot of vegetation. Do a tick check after being in the field.