

Algoma University Animal Care Committee	
#AU 0012 Getting Lost	
Issue date: June 2012	Last revised: May 2025

1) Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) describes acceptable procedures for what to do in the event you become lost while hiking. To provide a systematic procedure for preventing and responding to lost person incidents during university-affiliated outdoor activities. This SOP ensures the safety of participants and supports timely search and rescue operations.

Definitions

Lost Person: Any kind of individual who has become separated from the group or fails to arrive at a designated meeting point within a reasonable timeframe

Check-in point: A scheduled location or time at which all group members are required to account for their presence

Search and Rescue: Emergency response to locate and assist a lost or missing person

2) Policy

This SOP applies to all faculty, staff, students and researchers

3) Responsibility

Principal investigator, their research staff, and their student investigators

4) Training Required

None

5) Materials Required

Compass or GPS

Maps

Emergency Whistle

Two-Way Radio

Cell Phone - fully charged

High Visibility Clothing or Vest

Flashlight

Water and Snacks

Personal ID and Contact Info

6) Procedures

Prevention/Precaution

Pre Trip Preparation

1. Assign group leaders and sweepers

2. Designate rendezvous points and backup meeting locations
3. Provide maps, whistles, and communication devices (e.g., walkie-talkies, satellite phones)
4. Instruct participants on the STOP protocol:
 - S: Stop and stay calm**
 - T: Think (Do not rush)**
 - O: Observe (Use surroundings to get oriented)**
 - P: Plan (Decide what to do next)**

Communication Planning

1. Set communication check ins (Hourly or at major trail points)
2. Test devices (Phones, GPS, Radios) before departure
3. Ensure emergency contacts are accessible

On Site

1. Inform the Principal Investigator (PI)/Team Leader before travelling to any field sites for the day. The PI/Team Leader must be notified that you will spend the day in the field and which sites you plan to visit.
2. Inform the PI/Team Leader when you return from the field.
3. When working in the field, always use the buddy system. Work with at least one other individual and remain in close contact. You need not work side-by-side but keep track of each other's whereabouts and maintain contact using your two-way radios or cellphones.
4. Be sure to arrange a meeting place and time in case you lose cell/radio contact. Always make sure you leave the field site at the same time and confirm that you are finished for the day.
5. When working in the field, always carry a compass or GPS, whistle, and maps of the site. Use these when travelling to keep track of your location to avoid getting lost.

If You Get Lost

1. If you should happen to get lost, the best course of action is to remain where you are and remember the STOP protocol:
 - S: Stop and stay calm
 - T: Think (Do not rush)
 - O: Observe (Use surroundings to get oriented)
 - P: Plan (Decide what to do next)
2. Contact your buddy via cell-phone or radio and describe the last place you know was familiar so you can locate your buddy.
3. When your buddy has moved to the last familiar place, blow your whistle or make loud "WOOT" calls and have your buddy do the same.
4. Walk slowly towards your buddy and their call/whistle. Alternately, use your map and compass/GPS to travel in the direction that should take you to the nearest road/waterway and follow it to return to the meeting place.
5. If all methods fail, continue to remain where you are and wait for help to come. If you have not notified the PI/Team Leader of your return from the field and/or have failed to meet your buddy at the agreed upon time, attempts will be made to contact you.
6. If these attempts fail, a search will be initiated in the field area to locate you and bring you back safely. By remaining where you are, the search team will find you more easily.
7. Blow your whistle at regular intervals so that the searchers can locate you.

REVISION HISTORY		
Revision #	Revision Date	Summary of Changes
1	November 2019	Modified
2	May 2024	Additional review by Algoma H&S Office
3	May 2025	Reformatting
4	May 2025	Department of Life, Health & Safety and Security, reviewed and provided comments and additions to SOP.