



## The Rural Clinical School

# KARRATHA STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR COUNTRY DRIVING IN THE PILBARA

Current as at the 11<sup>th</sup> January 2012

### *Background*

#### **Welcome to Karratha.**

One of the great opportunities we have when we live in **Karratha** (*A land of rugged beauty and adventure*) is access to the bush, the mind blowing rock art the world class national park Karijini, and the sense of freedom and adventure that comes with that. We get to know, and feel a growing connection, to the place. Driving is an integral part of being able to access these opportunities 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**

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### *A safe vehicle:*

#### *RCSWA cars and 4WD*

The RCSWA is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is 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.

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- ❖ 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:**

- ❖ Tired
- ❖ Under the influence of alcohol or other drugs

## *Road Safety Survival Tips*

The Pilbara experiences a range of weather conditions ranging from cyclones to extreme dry periods, and off-road remote areas to developed town sites. You can check road conditions prior to, your journey by phoning 138 138. The following information is important and should be applied during your travels.

Particular risks in Pilbara region include:

Risk	Relevant information / measures
Gravel roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ 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.</li> <li>❖ If traffic signs warn of a gravel road ahead, slow down while you are still on the bitumen.</li> <li>❖ 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.</li> <li>❖ 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.</li> <li>❖ 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.</li> <li>❖ 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.</li> <li>❖ Consider using a lower gear when driving. It will give</li> </ul>

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	<p>you better control and enable you to use the engine as a brake rather than relying on the brakes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Try to steer and brake as smoothly as possible - jerky or sudden braking or steering will increase the risk of your vehicle skidding.</li> <li>❖ 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.</li> <li>❖ 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</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Flood ways/Water across Roadway</b></p>	<p>Some roads in the Pilbara are prone to flash flooding. Before crossing always check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The depth of the water by getting out the vehicle and physically walking the intended crossing. The water should be no higher than the bottom of the door on the conventional 2WD vehicles and no higher than the average adult's knee (when standing) on higher 4WD vehicles.</li> <li>❖ Look for submerged objects</li> <li>❖ Test strength of the flow of water.</li> <li>❖ Determine if the water level is rising or falling.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>IF ANY DOUBT DO NOT CROSS UNTIL YOU ARE SURE IT IS SAFE TO DO SO.</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Salt Flats/ Mud Flats</b></p>	<p><b>Salt flats, whilst they look stable are actually tidal. Do not take 4WDs or other vehicles onto salt/mud flats as you may get bogged.</b></p> <p><b>What to do if you get bogged</b>  <i>Even the most experienced drivers can get bogged.</i>  <i>Should this happen try the following actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Let some of the air out of your tyres and then try to drive out. Do not use all your energy trying to dig the vehicle out of soft sand if the vehicle continues to sink. Conserve as much energy as possible. If you are unable to free the vehicle yourself, use whatever communication means are available to you to contact others for assistance. Give accurate position details and advice of what equipment you have to use (e.g. snatch strap, etc.). <b>Wait in your vehicle.</b></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Road trains / Heavy Vehicles (up to 53.5m long)</b></p>	<p>Road trains can be up to 53.5 meters long. These vehicles use both sealed and unsealed roads in the Pilbara. To overtake or pass these vehicles keep the following in mind:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Ensure the road ahead is clear when overtaking.</li><li>❖ Overtake quickly; don't hesitate.</li><li>❖ Allow the road train plenty of room to brake and maneuver.</li><li>❖ Make allowances for the wind buffeting your car as you pass.</li><li>❖ 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.</li><li>❖ Be patient.</li><li>❖ Do not pull out onto a road when a road train is approaching.</li><li>❖ Road trains require a great stopping/breaking distance.</li><li>❖ Do not stop on narrow sections of road.</li><li>❖ Do not overtake near junctions - road trains may require two lanes in order to turn.</li><li>❖ If a road train is approaching from the opposite direction and the road is narrow, pull over off the bitumen if necessary &amp; allow as much room as possible.</li><li>❖ If you have a CB radio in your car, let the driver of the road train know that you are behind &amp; wish to overtake.</li><li>❖ The driver will tell you / or indicate when it is safe to do so.</li></ul> <p><b>Be patient when following oversize vehicles which may be under the control of police or private escort. Do not attempt to overtake these vehicles unless directed to do so by the driver of the rear escort vehicle. When overtaking, do so with care and overtake both the rear escort vehicle and the oversize load as swiftly as possible.</b></p>
<p><b>Straying Animals/ Wild Animals on the road</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Don't drive at dawn / dusk.</li><li>❖ Don't drive at night.</li><li>❖ Don't swerve to miss an animal - you may lose control of the vehicle &amp; you can't predict which way the animal will go. Slow down as much as possible &amp; 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.</li><li>❖ Drive within the range of your headlights.</li></ul>
<p><b>Travelling on remote roads</b></p>	<p>Most roads in the Pilbara are not isolated but if you go to remote locations be sure to inform someone when you go and again when you get back.</p>

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<b>Extremes of weather (e.g. heat, rain, cold)</b>	Get up-to-date information about road and weather conditions. The Pilbara is a <b>very hot</b> area, the Marble Bar area is often quoted as the hottest place in Australia. Intermittently UWA will send out email warnings and these must be followed.
<b>Breaking down</b>	<b>In the event that your vehicle breaks down, the following actions are strongly recommended:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ If possible, get your vehicle off the road and onto the verge. If your vehicle obstructs the roadway, place reflectorized markers on the road preceding the vehicle to advise approaching motorists. If no reflectorized markers are available, use the “hazard warning lights” fitted to the vehicle as well as the park/tail lights.</li><li>❖ If you are in a remote area – <b>STAY WITH YOUR VEHICLE UNTIL HELP ARRIVES</b> – do not walk to get help. It is easier to find a vehicle than a person.</li><li>❖ If in mobile phone range rings the appropriate emergency contact.</li></ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Mobile phones have a limited range outside many populated centres. Check with your service provider as to what areas your phone will operate. It is worth noting that many hills in the Pilbara region have a high concentration of metal ore. This may affect reception and range even if you are well within the service area.</li><li>❖ It is dangerous to use handheld mobile phone whilst driving</li><li>❖ Think about mobile phone cover in your area and whether another device is required (e.g. sat phone, UHF radio, GPS tracking device). Some organisations (such as RFDS) hire satellite phones for travellers going to remote areas.</li></ul>
<b>Bushfire</b>	Be particularly careful entering smoke across the road. Put on your lights, keep to the left, and drive very slowly. Anticipate that there may be fire-fighting appliances across the road or in the road
<b>Injury / illness on the road</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ 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.</li><li>❖ Contact (or have someone contact) Ambulance,</li></ul>

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	Police, etc. if required. If the total damage exceeds \$1000.00 (and the police don't attend the scene) the crash must be reported to the nearest police station without delay.
<b>Journeys outside this SOP e.g. Kalgoorlie</b>	If you intend travelling more than five hours you must have a driving plan which you discuss with a coordinator. This is obligatory.
<b>Night driving</b>	Night driving is not allowed on RCSWA required journeys.
<b>Long trips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Don't drive more than 10 hours per day</li><li>❖ Don't drive when you are tired</li><li>❖ Share driving with others</li><li>❖ Plan a stop at least every three hours for 20 minutes.</li><li>❖ Don't plan to drive after a day's work.</li><li>❖</li></ul>
<b>Driving into the sun</b>	If you cannot see you cannot drive. It may require you to stop driving and stay off the road until conditions improve.
<b>Fatigue</b>	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.
<b>Loose objects</b>	Loose objects, bottles etc. represent a significant hazard in vehicles during an accident. Carry your junk in the boot.

**Road safety is your responsibility. We in the Pilbara want you to enjoy your stay and so it is important that you DO understand the information contained in this SOP.**

**Remember, it is better to be safe than to be sorry, so if you are unsure of any circumstance – find out details about the situation first, don't take a risk.**

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