



# **VOLUNTEER FOR SCIENCE HANDBOOK**

**500-23-H**

**June 2011**

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*U.S. Geological Survey Manual*

**United States Department of the Interior**

**U.S. Geological Survey**

**Volunteer for Science Handbook 500-23-H**

**Prepared by the Office of Human Resources**

**FOREWORD**

This *Volunteer for Science Handbook* (500-23-H) supplements Survey Manual Chapter 500.23, Volunteer Service Acceptance.

Questions regarding the content of the *Handbook* may be directed to the Office of Human Resources, Mail Stop 157, 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston, Virginia 20192.

The previous edition of this *Handbook* dated May 2000 is hereby superseded.

/s/ Alesia Pierre-Louis

June 27, 2011

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Acting Associate Director  
for Human Capital

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Date

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **CHAPTER 1. ELIGIBILITY**

1. Scientist Emeritus
2. Individuals and Groups
3. Volunteer Services Donated by an External Source
4. Minors – Volunteers under Age 18
5. Federal Employees and Family Members
6. Noncitizen Volunteers

### **CHAPTER 2. HEALTH AND SAFETY OF VOLUNTEERS**

1. Operation of Machinery and Equipment
2. Hazardous Conditions
3. Firearms
4. Helicopters and Unscheduled Aircraft
5. Boats and Rafts
6. Safety Standards
7. Restrictions for Volunteers under Age 18

### **CHAPTER 3. ETHICS**

### **CHAPTER 4. REIMBURSEMENT OF INCIDENTAL EXPENSES**

1. Local Travel
2. Long-Distance Travel
3. International Travel

### **CHAPTER 5. VOLUNTEER BENEFITS AND PROTECTIONS**

1. Federal Employees Compensation Act
2. Federal Tort Claims Act

### **CHAPTER 6. GENERAL GUIDELINES**

1. Physical Requirements
2. Security Investigation
3. Use of Government-Owned or -Leased Vehicles
4. Attendance Schedules
5. Equipment, Materials, and Supplies
6. Temporary Identification Passes
7. Parking
8. Government Charge Cards

## **CHAPTER 7. FORMS**

1. Volunteer Services Agreement for Natural Resources Agencies (OF-301A)
2. Emergency Care for Minors
3. Job Hazard Analysis (JHA)

## **CHAPTER 8. RECOGNITION**

1. Types of Recognition

## **CHAPTER 9. RECORDKEEPING AND REPORTING**

1. Individual Volunteer Data
2. Procedures

## **CHAPTER 10. PROGRAM DATA**

1. Reports

## **CHAPTER 11. ANNOUNCING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

## CHAPTER 1. ELIGIBILITY

People of all ages and backgrounds may donate their time, talent, and expertise to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The Volunteer for Science Program currently includes citizens, noncitizens (who live in the United States on a working visa), retired employees, USGS employees and scientist emeriti, homemakers, high school students, college students, teachers and faculty members. There are no age restrictions, but volunteers under the age of 18 years must have the written permission of a parent or guardian before they can volunteer and are restricted to tasks allowed by Federal child labor laws and the child labor laws for the State in which they volunteer. All volunteer assignments should be of mutual benefit to both the volunteer and to the USGS.

**1. Scientist Emeritus Program.** The Scientist Emeritus Program (SE) has been an important component of the USGS since its inception in 1986 as part of the USGS Volunteer for Science Program. It currently is coordinated in the USGS Office of Science Quality and Integrity. The purpose of the SE Program is for retired USGS scientists and technical experts to volunteer their expertise, intellect, and creativity in efforts that allow them to remain active in the geoscience community, enhance the programmatic activities of the USGS, and serve the public. The SE Program is open to all scientists and technical experts who have demonstrated leadership qualities and contributed to the goals of the USGS during a productive career. As long as the individual applying has been a scientist or technical expert, the series, grade, or title will not prohibit that individual from being considered for the SE Program. Those individuals who do not qualify for the SE Program should consider becoming part of the USGS Volunteer for Science Program.

Scientists Emeriti can contribute to the USGS in many ways:

- (1) Continue scientific investigations and complete products.
- (2) Start new areas of research that are of importance to the USGS and the Nation.
- (3) Provide expertise in support of USGS projects and programs.
- (4) Provide seasoned counsel to managers and individual scientists.
- (5) Mentor current or new employees and students.
- (6) Provide an institutional memory within the Federal Government.
- (7) Contribute to professional societies.
- (8) Serve on scientific advisory committees.
- (9) Provide outreach to community groups about USGS activities and topics related to the scientist's expertise.

Additional information relating to the SE Program and its opportunities can be found at the Ethics Office Web page: [http://www.usgs.gov/quality\\_integrity/emeritus/](http://www.usgs.gov/quality_integrity/emeritus/). As a condition of appointment and continuation in the SE Program, participants must abide by the Scientist Emeritus ethics rules posted on the Ethics Office Web page.

- 2. Individuals and Groups.** Generally, volunteer services are contributed directly to the USGS by individuals or members of a group or organization acting as individuals. The “Volunteer Services Agreement for Natural Resources Agencies” (OF-301A) is used as the official document for the acceptance of volunteer service and must be signed by both the volunteer and an appropriate USGS official. The parent(s) or guardian(s) of a minor must sign the OF-301A, and additional USGS supervisory and safety staff signatures are required indicating concurrence for minors to participate in activities that expose them to hazards for which specific safety precautions are required.
- 3. Volunteer Services Donated by an External Source.** There may be cases in which an employer, such as a professional society or a private industry firm, wishes to donate the services of a paid employee to the USGS. In these cases, the individual may receive pay or work credit from the outside source, but the USGS cannot compensate the individual or the outside organization for the services. In such cases, the OF-301A should be signed by both the volunteer and the employer who is donating the paid services of the volunteer. The agreement should reflect the name of the organization and the name, title, and signature of the employer donating the services.
- 4. Minors - Volunteers under Age 18.** The Volunteer for Science Program has no minimum age requirement for volunteers. However, volunteers under age 18 must have the signature of a parent(s) or guardian(s) on the OF-301A and must complete the “Emergency Care for Minors” medical release form located at: <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/hro/recruit/minorchildcare.pdf>. The medical release form must be completed and signed by the minor's parent(s) or guardian(s) before the volunteer service begins. The medical release form identifies medical and health conditions that a supervisor or medical professional may need to take into consideration prior to assigning work or providing care, and it authorizes treatment for medical emergencies in the event the parent or guardian cannot be reached. The signatures of both parent(s) or guardian(s) are preferred on the form; however, one signature is acceptable. Because the original form must accompany the minor for medical care, supervisors are required to have the original available at the site of the volunteer's activities where it can be immediately accessed in an emergency. A copy of the form must be filed in the supervisor's administrative office.
- A. Supervisors are cautioned against signing up volunteers who may not be sufficiently mature to function successfully in a work setting. All volunteer assignments are restricted to tasks allowed by Federal child labor laws and the State child labor laws for the State in which the volunteer activities occur.
- B. Federal child labor laws govern the employment of minors and preclude the performance of certain jobs by individuals under the age of 18 years. Federal agencies are required to apply the provisions of Federal child labor laws to volunteers even though the volunteers are not in an employment status and receive no salary. Managers and supervisors must familiarize themselves with the Federal child labor laws found at: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/index.htm>.
- C. All States have child labor standards. When Federal and State standards are different, the rules that provide the most protection to young workers will apply. Relevant State child labor laws can be found on individual State government Web sites.

(1) *Minors under Age 16.* Federal Child Labor Requirements. Pertinent information relating to the employment of minors who are 14 and 15 years of age is provided at: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/exemptionsFLSA.htm>. A specific description of occupations, number of hours, and working conditions that 14- and 15-year-old minors are allowed to work is found under that heading. Managers and supervisors must carefully review the provisions of this document before accepting the services of any volunteer who is a minor. The child labor provisions for 14- and 15-year-olds must be applied without exception and should be carefully considered before permitting a child younger than 14 years of age to volunteer. Permission from a parent or guardian is not an acceptable basis for permitting a minor to volunteer in any of the excluded occupations.

(2) *Minors under Age 18.* The Fair Labor Standards Act “prohibits minors under age 18 years to work in any occupation that it deems to be hazardous.” Therefore, USGS volunteers under the age of 18 years cannot participate in those occupations specifically identified as hazardous in the Fair Labor Standards Act. The minimum age of 18 for these occupations applies even when the minor is employed by the parent or guardian. Even with the approval of a parent or guardian, a volunteer under the age of 18 years must not be permitted to perform tasks in any of the hazardous occupations specifically identified at: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/hazardousjobs.htm#lawregs>.

(3) *Restrictions in the Use of Minors as Volunteers.* In addition to applying child labor laws in the utilization of minor volunteers, the USGS prohibits assigning duties to minors that involve any of the following or similar types of activities that might potentially constitute a hazard:

- (a) Underwater diving.
- (b) Use of toxic chemicals or exposure to other laboratory hazards.
- (c) Exposure to radiation or biological hazards.
- (d) Riding in helicopters or unscheduled aircraft.
- (e) Driving Government-owned or leased motorized vehicles.
- (f) Operation of power-driven machinery or equipment; e.g., chain saws, power shop tools, rock crushers, drill rigs, specialized equipment or vehicles, etc.
- (g) Use of firearms, explosives, or incendiaries.

(4) If the State in which a minor volunteers has a higher standard of child labor laws than those of the Federal Government, the State laws should be used.

(5) Minor volunteers may perform fieldwork only as part of a group or team consisting of two or more USGS employees who accompanies them at all times. In addition, the USGS scientist in charge of the project must sign the Volunteer Services Agreement to accept responsibility for the safety of the minor. Under no circumstances may minors substitute for a USGS employee in constituting the required number of individuals on a team or group.

(6) Permission from a parent or guardian is not an acceptable basis for permitting a minor to volunteer in any position prohibited either by law or by the Volunteer for Science Program. Employees' minor children are not exempt from these restrictions.

## **5. Federal Employees and Family Members.**

*A. Acceptance of Volunteer Service from USGS Employees and Employees of Other Federal Agencies.* A USGS employee may serve as a volunteer within the USGS as long as the services performed as a volunteer are not the same types of duties for which the employee is paid. For example, a hydrologic technician may not volunteer to collect hydrologic data, make and compute streamflow measurements, or make ground water measurements since this work is typically an integral part of the official duties.

(1) A USGS employee is not allowed to volunteer to perform the duties of the official assignment in order to avoid any violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act or to avoid the perception that the employee is being asked to volunteer time in lieu of overtime compensation. This guidance pertains to both exempt and nonexempt employees.

(2) An employee of a Federal agency other than the USGS may volunteer to perform any duties for which he or she is qualified, including those which are the same as or similar to the official duties.

(3) USGS or other Federal employees must be the ones who initiate the volunteer service. They must donate their services on their own time.

(4) USGS or other Federal employees, while performing volunteer service for the USGS, are considered private citizens and do not receive insurance or liability benefits other than those provided to volunteers. In a situation where compensation is necessary based on pay, the comparable pay level of the volunteer position is the basis for determining benefits. In some cases, this level may be substantially lower than the pay level of the individual's officially appointed Federal position.

(5) If a USGS or other Federal employee is injured while serving on a volunteer assignment and becomes unable to perform official job duties, the individual may be able to file for worker's compensation or disability retirement, whichever is warranted by the nature of the injury. However, the individual may not collect from worker's compensation and disability retirement simultaneously.

*B. Acceptance of Volunteer Service from Relatives of USGS Employees.* The following guidelines are provided regarding the acceptance of volunteer service by family members of USGS employees:

(1) Immediate family members and other relatives of USGS employees may serve as volunteers and may work in the same office or on the same assignment with the USGS employee.

(2) The Volunteer Services Agreement (OF-301A), which authorizes the volunteer assignment, should not be signed by a relative of the USGS employee.

(3) Authorization to pay incidental expenses to a volunteer cannot be approved by a relative of a volunteer.

(4) USGS employees may not supervise relatives who are serving as volunteers.

(5) USGS policy is not to pay travel-related expenses for volunteer service provided by the relative of a USGS employee who is participating on a joint project or assignment with the employee. However, such expenses may be approved in exceptional cases by the Science Center Director or equivalent level. The requests for approval must be submitted in writing and describe the value of the volunteer's proposed service and why travel costs are justified and would not appear to financially benefit the employee. For example, permitting spouses to accompany employees on official travel without personally having to pay travel costs is not a valid reason for paying volunteer travel-related expenses. Copies of these requests and the decision of the manager approving the request should be retained in the office administrative files.

6. **Noncitizen Volunteers.** A noncitizen may volunteer for the USGS provided the individual is:

A. A legal, permanent resident of the United States or on a working visa.

B. Pursuing a full course of study at an academic institution, and the academic institution has granted the individual permission to engage in volunteer activity with the USGS.

C. Foreign nationals may not be invited by the USGS to enter the United States or any other country for the purpose of participating in the Volunteer for Science Program. A supervisor wishing to accept volunteer service from a foreign national who resides outside the United States should contact the respective organizational Exchange Visiting Scientist Program Coordinator for guidance.

<http://international.usgs.gov/usgs/exchange/index.html>.

## **CHAPTER 2. HEALTH AND SAFETY OF VOLUNTEERS**

The USGS is profoundly concerned with the health and safety of its employees, volunteers, contractors, and visitors. The USGS is committed to the goal of building a safety and health culture that will achieve zero loss to human and material resources. In support of this goal, the Volunteer for Science Program has developed health and safety guidelines and requirements for managers, supervisors, and volunteers.

The Volunteer for Science Program managers, supervisors, and volunteers must practice safe behavior and avoid unacceptable risks. No volunteer activity may be performed where careful analysis shows an unacceptable risk to any employee, volunteer, contractor, or visitor. No volunteer is ever required to accept an assignment he or she does not feel comfortable doing or is not willing to agree to do.

Managers and supervisors must exercise proper safety precautions in accepting volunteer services and must disclose potential health or safety conditions in the "*Description of service to be performed*" section of the OF-301A. When required by the nature of the volunteer service, personal safety equipment and clothing will be provided by the USGS and must be used to aid in preventing injuries. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that volunteers receive safety training, equipment, and clothing

necessary to safely perform their assignments. In addition, any potentially hazardous activity must be specifically identified on Page 3 – Continuation Page of the OF-301A to include a detailed description of the work and the part(s) of the project in which the volunteer will participate. If the volunteer is a minor, the signatures of the parent(s) or guardian(s) denoting that they understand the activities in which the minor will participate must be obtained.

Except in very rare cases, managers and supervisors may not assign duties that expose volunteers to high-hazard working conditions or physical hardships. As a general rule, these situations would include: (1) conditions that are considered a hazard or hardship for Federal pay purposes or (2) circumstances in which an accident could result in serious injury or death. (Refer to SM 370.550.10, Environmental Differential.) In rare cases where a volunteer's experience or training provides exceptional skill or ability in dealing with hazardous situations, a waiver request may be submitted and an exception may be made only after careful evaluation and approval by the manager or supervisor with concurrence by the respective Area or Headquarters Operational Support Safety Manager. Exceptions related to aviation, diving, firearms, large vessel, radiation, and watercraft activities must receive additional concurrence from the respective Bureau Specialized Safety Program Manager. The Headquarters Operational Support Safety Manager or Specialized Safety Program Managers can provide further clarification about specific high-hazard situations that should be avoided.

Volunteers must observe the same safety precautions and receive training in the use of the safety equipment as required of the permanent workforce. The volunteer is entitled to a clear description of the assignment and any risk factors that may affect health or safety. The project description and relevant risk factors must be clearly specified on the Volunteer Services Agreement; additionally, the Job Hazard Analysis (JHA), as described in USGS *Occupational Safety and Health Program Requirements Handbook*, 445-2H, Chapter 15, Job Hazards Analyses, must be completed to document the job tasks, risk factors, and actions taken to minimize or eliminate the volunteer's exposure to hazardous or potentially hazardous conditions. Both the OF-301A and the JHA must be provided to the volunteer prior to the start of the volunteer activities. Volunteers are encouraged to communicate safety ideas, concerns, and suggestions to the manager, supervisor, a Safety Officer, or to the USGS Volunteer Coordinator.

**1. Operation of Machinery and Equipment.** Volunteers age 18 or older may be assigned to operate machinery or equipment; e.g., chain saws, power shop tools, specialized equipment or vehicles, etc., under the following conditions: (1) they must demonstrate their proficiency in the operation of that equipment to the satisfaction of the responsible supervisor or (2) they must receive appropriate training prior to the operation of the equipment. Under no circumstances may minor volunteers be assigned to operate machinery or equipment, including vehicles and watercraft owned by the Government.

**2. Hazardous Conditions.** Volunteers age 18 years or older who are assigned to projects where there are potentially hazardous conditions; e.g., helicopters or other unscheduled aircraft, watercraft, heavy equipment, laboratories with toxic chemicals or radiation, underwater diving, etc., must have these conditions noted in detail in the "*Description of service to be performed*" section of the OF-301A. In addition, a statement must be added to Page 3, Continuation Page of the OF-301A, confirming that the volunteer: (1) has been informed of the job tasks, hazardous conditions, and risk factors inherent in the assignment and advised as to actions taken to minimize or eliminate exposure(s) to the hazardous or potentially hazardous conditions; (2) has received appropriate safety training and personal protective

equipment; and (3) has been advised of the possible extent and limitations of benefits that may be available in the event of injury. The statement allowing the volunteer to participate in the project must be signed by the supervisor, the respective Area, Headquarters Operational Support, or Specialized Safety Program Manager, and the volunteer.

Organizational managers and supervisors who wish to assign minor volunteers between the ages of 16 and 18 to projects or activities where there are potentially hazardous conditions must complete the OF-301A and obtain parental or guardian concurrence. The signatures of both parents and guardians are recommended; however, the signature of one is acceptable. The OF-301A should then include the Job Hazard Analysis, the "Emergency Care for Minors" medical release form and other justification. Additional waiver concurrence shall be obtained for projects or activities involving aviation, diving, firearms, large vessel, radiation, and watercraft from the respective Specialized Safety Program Manager or Health Physicist.

Managers and supervisors shall ensure that the volunteer involvement must be passive in nature and not directly conducting hazardous duties for any and all activities involving a minor. Under no circumstances may minor volunteers under the age of 16 be assigned to projects involving potentially hazardous conditions.

3. **Firearms.** Volunteers age 18 years or older who are assigned to projects requiring participants to carry firearms must have this condition noted in the "*Description of service to be performed*" section of the OF-301A. In addition, a statement must be added to Page 3, Continuation Page of the OF-301A, confirming that the volunteer: (1) has been informed of the specific conditions of the assignment requiring the carrying and possible use of a firearm; (2) has received appropriate safety training as outlined in SM 445-2-H Chapter 29, which includes the demonstration of acceptable proficiency in the use of the firearm. Alternative firearms safety courses can be substituted if approved by the Bureau or the respective Area Firearms Safety Manager; and (3) has been advised of the extent and limitations of benefits that may be available in the event of injury. The statement must be signed by the manager, supervisor, and volunteer, and approved by the respective Area or Headquarters Operational Support Safety Officer and the Bureau Specialized Firearms Safety Program Manager.

Minor volunteers between the ages of 16 and 18 may be assigned to projects that utilize firearms provided all requirements are met as prescribed in Paragraph 2 above, but they are not allowed to fire or carry firearms of any kind. Under no circumstances may minor volunteers under the age of 16 be assigned to projects that utilize firearms.

4. **Helicopters and Unscheduled Aircraft.** See Paragraph 2 entitled "*Hazardous Conditions*" above.

5. **Boats and Rafts.** See Paragraph 2 entitled "*Hazardous Conditions*" above. By definition, all boats (including non-motorized) and rafts are defined as hazardous. Volunteers who participate in a primary science role in operations such as crew members in watercraft shall receive the appropriate safety training provided to USGS employees and comply with Chapter 31, Watercraft Safety, of the USGS *Occupational Safety and Health Program Requirements Handbook*, SM 445-2-H. In addition to proper training, (1) Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) shall be U.S. Coast Guard approved, properly fitted, and in compliance with the existing USGS safety standards; (2) where waders are worn, volunteers will be additionally trained in "Over-the-Water" Training; (3) if auto-inflate PFD's are provided, the volunteer

will receive additional training in the use of this hybrid PFD and particular attention shall be given to the manufacturer's suggested weight restrictions; (4) a Type 1 PFD should be considered for non-swimmers or weak swimmers; and (5) where volunteers are working in cold-water (hypothermic) conditions (water temperatures less than 20 degrees C or 70 degrees F), the USGS will provide cold weather protective Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and additional safety training in the use of this specialized equipment. Additional information regarding PFDs, PPEs, and training requirements can be found in 485 DM 22, Watercraft Safety. Volunteers who are participating without a primary science role in operations such as observers/passengers in these crafts will be required to wear properly fitted PFDs or PPEs [based on environmental conditions addressed above in (5)].

Observers and passengers will not be issued auto-inflate PFDs without documented appropriate training. Additionally, observers and passengers will be required to participate in a safety briefing by the boat operator (or designate). This safety briefing will address potential hazards for the operation as noted within the JHA and include the locations and use of all safety equipment on board. Under no circumstances may minor volunteers be assigned to operate watercraft owned by the Government.

**6. Safety Standards.** To ensure the health and safety of everyone, managers, supervisors, employees, and volunteers are expected to:

A. Comply with all Department of the Interior (Interior) and USGS standards contained in regulations, manuals, handbooks, or other regulatory publications.

B. Receive appropriate required safety and health training per USGS *Occupational Safety and Health Program Requirements Handbook*, SM 445-2-H, Chapter 14, Training," prior to conducting the task/activity. In addition, managers and supervisors are encouraged to use the following National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Web sites as additional training resources for volunteer workers: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/talkingsafety/> and <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/talkingsafety/video.html>.

C. Use required personal protective equipment and other safety equipment.

D. Report all unsafe or unhealthful working conditions to the supervisor.

E. Report all work-related accidents, injuries, or illnesses to the supervisor.

F. Follow all work procedures for the tasks assigned.

**7. Restrictions for Volunteers under Age 18.** Chapter 1, Paragraph 4, and Chapter 2, Paragraphs 2-3, of this *Handbook* provide specific guidance for volunteers under the age of 18. Permission from a parent or guardian is not an acceptable basis for permitting a minor to volunteer in any position prohibited by Federal or State law or by the Volunteer for Science Program. Employees' minor children are not exempt from these restrictions.

## CHAPTER 3. ETHICS

Volunteer service must be undertaken for the purpose of accomplishing the USGS mission. A position as a USGS volunteer brings with it significant visibility and responsibility. Consequently, there are a number of ethics rules that volunteers must follow as a condition of receiving and retaining volunteer status.

1. Volunteers must avoid conflicts of interest between their volunteer duties and their financial interests. Volunteers may not use their volunteer status for personal financial gain or the financial gain of people or entities whose financial interests are imputed to them; i.e., their spouse; minor children; general partner; an organization in which the volunteer serves as an officer, director, trustee, general partner; an entity with whom the volunteer is employed; or a person or entity with whom the employee is negotiating for or has an arrangement concerning prospective employment. This restriction includes providing recommendations and advice to USGS personnel or to entities with which the USGS has collaborative agreements or to which the USGS provides grant funding.
2. Volunteers must keep the USGS personnel with whom they are associated as a volunteer informed as to employment status. This enables USGS personnel to determine whether there are projects on which the volunteer should not work and to assist in avoiding conflicts of interest. Supervisors of volunteers must avoid assigning duties to individuals that would present a conflict of interest.
3. Volunteers must protect and conserve Government resources. Government resources may only be used for authorized purposes and may not be used for any commercial activity.
4. Volunteers may only use USGS information technology resources (computer, Internet, telephone, etc.) in accordance with Interior's limited use policies. See <http://elips.doi.gov/elips/0/doc/1368/Page1.aspx> (Limited Equipment Use) and <http://www.fws.gov/policy/m0275.pdf> (Limited Telephone Use). If volunteers are engaged in employment outside the USGS, a USGS email account may not be used in association with the employment.
5. Volunteers are subject to the requirements and conditions of 305 DM3, Integrity of Scientific and Scholarly Activities <[http://elips.doi.gov/app\\_dm/act\\_getfiles.cfm?relnum=3889](http://elips.doi.gov/app_dm/act_getfiles.cfm?relnum=3889)> and [SM Chapter 500.25](#), Scientific Integrity. These documents establish USGS and Interior policy for ensuring scientific integrity in the conduct of scientific activities and procedures for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating allegations of scientific misconduct by USGS employees and volunteers.
6. Volunteers may not release non-public information to unauthorized entities. The USGS is the principal source of scientific and technical expertise in earth and biological sciences within the Federal Government. Because of the scope of the programs of the USGS and its involvement with unpublished, confidential, or proprietary information, it is essential that volunteers and supervisors understand the concerns of the USGS regarding unauthorized use or release of data. All information and data collected by a volunteer are considered provisional until verified by a supervisor or other qualified USGS employee.

7. Volunteers may not testify or provide a deposition as an expert witness in matters concerning volunteer work or concerning the work of the USGS project or team with which the individual is associated without prior authorization from the USGS Ethics Office.
8. Volunteers may not fundraise on Government property or use Government resources to fundraise except as permitted by the Combined Federal Campaign regulations and policies.
9. Volunteers may not engage in political activity in Government facilities or use Government resources to engage in political activities.
10. Volunteers may not engage in lobbying activities using appropriated funds or Government resources.
11. Volunteers may not enter private property unless authorized by the supervisor who has obtained appropriate permission.
12. Volunteers may not collect monies and fees owed to the U.S. Government.
13. Volunteers are not authorized to make any commitments or promises of any kind that could be interpreted to bind the Government or create any financial obligation on the part of the USGS.
14. If there is a question as to whether a volunteer's assignment creates an actual or potential conflict of interest or raises concern regarding the impartiality of the volunteer, the supervisor shall offer the volunteer the opportunity to serve in another USGS capacity to eliminate the conflict of interest (or appearance of a conflict of interest) or impartiality concern. If the conflict of interest or impartiality concern cannot be resolved, the volunteer's service with the USGS shall be terminated. Whenever possible, the volunteer should be referred to the local, regional, or office volunteer coordinator, as appropriate, for placement.

#### **CHAPTER 4. REIMBURSEMENT OF INCIDENTAL EXPENSES**

1. **Local Travel.** The USGS has the authority to reimburse volunteers for incidental expenses incurred as a result of their volunteer service. Although the authority exists to reimburse volunteers for certain expenses, reimbursement is not mandatory. An important guideline for managers and supervisors to consider when authorizing payment of incidental expenses is that the volunteer service rendered be significant enough to offset expenses paid.
  - A. Volunteers may be reimbursed for actual expenses, such as bus and train fare, gasoline, and parking fees, while traveling to and from the work site. The distance for which volunteers are reimbursed for such travel expenses should be limited to the local commuting area. However, reimbursement of travel expenses to and from the work site should not be routinely approved.
  - B. Reimbursement is not meant to function as a salary but rather to offset the volunteer's personal cost of volunteering. Under no circumstances may a volunteer receive a stipend in exchange for volunteer service. Stipends are regarded as income and must be reported as such for tax purposes.

C. Unless otherwise specified, reimbursement claims should be submitted on existing Government forms and handled in accord with the established procedures that apply to USGS employees. The supervisor should specify the frequency with which the volunteer may submit claims for reimbursement; e.g., once every 14 days.

D. Any documents or forms submitted to claim reimbursement of incidental expenses for volunteers must clearly note "volunteer" after the name.

E. Volunteers must claim their own incidental expenses. Supervisors or co-workers must not charge travel or other expenses for volunteers on their personal credit cards or make expenditures on behalf of volunteers, and, subsequently, claim reimbursement. Supervisors should discuss the office's position on the payment of incidental expenses with the volunteer and provide clear and specific guidance on allowable incidental costs. All reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenses must be approved prior to the volunteer incurring the expense.

**2. Long-Distance Travel.** If a volunteer is involved in field work or a special assignment that requires long-distance travel, expenses may be paid by the USGS. Authorization to pay transportation costs, advance funds, and reimburse long-distance travel expenses must be handled on a case-by-case basis, be justified in writing, and be approved by the appropriate manager or designee. (See Chapter 3, Ethics, of this *Handbook*, for guidance regarding travel expenses for volunteer service provided by a relative of a USGS employee when the relative is participating on a joint project or assignment with the employee.) Existing Government forms should be used, and established procedures that apply to USGS employees must be followed.

A. Volunteers are cautioned to be aware that making travel arrangements outside the established Government procedures for long-distance travel may make them ineligible for the protections afforded employees and volunteers on official travel. Guidelines for Government travel may be found at: <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/finance/travel.html>.

**3. International Travel.** International travel for volunteers must be requested and authorized in accordance with USGS and Interior guidelines. USGS guidelines can be found at: [http://international.usgs.gov/usgs/travel/user\\_guide/](http://international.usgs.gov/usgs/travel/user_guide/). Interior guidance can be found at: <http://www.doi.gov/intl/travel-guidance.cfm#>). Before submitting requests for approval, the manager or other designated official should determine that the volunteer service will sufficiently offset the travel expenses incurred or is significant enough to justify the travel expenses. Proper travel procedures must be followed and approvals obtained in accordance with SM 340.1, Authority for Travel, and SM 205.2, Travel Delegations. Supervisors should consult the administrative staff or the Office of Accounting and Financial Management for assistance, as appropriate.

## **CHAPTER 5. VOLUNTEER BENEFITS AND PROTECTIONS**

Volunteers receive the same benefits and protection as USGS employees under the Federal Employees Compensation Act, 5 U.S.C., Chapter 81, and the Federal Tort Claims Act, 28 U.S.C., 2671 through 2680. Both documents can be found on Web site: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>. Many employees are required to travel in Government aircraft. The volunteer and parent(s) or guardian(s) must be apprised that many private personal life insurance policies (other than FEGLI) are invalidated

as a result of such job-related flying requirements. In addition, exclusionary clauses in private policies often exclude life insurance coverage for aviation, scuba diving, skydiving, and other hazards. [Personnel Management Bulletin 94-38 (870)]

**1. Federal Employees Compensation Act.** This Act entitles volunteers to first aid and medical care for on-the-job injuries as well as hospital care, when necessary. When travel is necessary to receive medical care, transportation may be furnished and/or the travel and incidental expenses associated with it may be reimbursable. When death results from an on-the-job injury, burial and funeral expenses, not to exceed \$800, may be paid. In addition, other compensation may be approved by the Office of Workers Compensation Programs on a case-by-case basis. Because volunteers are unpaid, they do not receive compensation for lost wages.

A. A volunteer who suffers an on-the-job injury and desires to file a claim for compensation should contact his or her immediate supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for helping the volunteer obtain and complete the proper forms and must certify the authenticity of the claim. The supervisor then submits the claim to the servicing human resources office for processing. In addition, managers or supervisors are responsible for documenting the accident/injury in Interior's Safety Management Information System at: <https://www.smis.doi.gov/>.

Managers and supervisors may contact Area or Headquarters Operational Safety staff for information and/or assistance in entering the report.

B. Supervisors should contact their administrative staff for forms and guidance. If the administrative staff needs assistance, contact the servicing human resources offices.

**2. Federal Tort Claims Act.** This Act provides a means to award damages as a result of claims against the USGS for injury or loss of property or personal injury or death caused by the negligent or wrongful act or omission of any employee of the USGS while acting within the scope of his or her office or employment under circumstances where the USGS, if a private person, would be liable to the claimant in accordance with the law of the locality where the act or omission occurred. Since volunteers are considered employees by the provisions of this Act, they are offered the protection of the Act for personal liability as long as they are within the scope of their assigned responsibilities.

A. *Procedures for Processing Tort Claims.* The supervisor should follow the same procedures and use the same forms that are prescribed when a USGS employee is injured or involved in a tort claim. Administrative staff or the servicing human resources office can provide general guidance for completing and processing tort claims.

(1) Since volunteers receive injury and tort claims coverage, it is imperative that the volunteers be properly signed up and operate under written descriptions of duties containing specific information on the type of services they are assigned to do and the specific dates and times of performance. This information is necessary should questions arise on whether a volunteer was acting within the assigned responsibilities.

(2) Questions regarding tort claims should be referred to the USGS tort claims officer. See SM 451.1, Tort Claims Against the United States, for additional information.

## CHAPTER 6. GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. **Physical Requirements.** Volunteers must be physically capable of safely and efficiently performing the services agreed upon without hazard to themselves or to others. In some assignments, performance of duties requires manual dexterity and normal hearing, vision, speech, depth perception, and ability to distinguish colors. However, a specific physical condition or impairment will not automatically disqualify an applicant from performing service under the Volunteer for Science Program.

A. Some assignments may require moderate to arduous physical exertion under rigorous and unusual environmental conditions; e.g., prolonged walking, standing, crawling, climbing, kneeling, lifting, reaching, etc.

B. Environmental or other conditions of the volunteer assignments may require travel over rugged, precipitous, slippery, and hazardous terrain at high elevations; participating in water activities; carrying backpacks full of equipment; exposure to the elements when performing services outside; performing services with or around machinery with moving parts; performing services alone and with others; and exposure to dust, smoke, fumes, or gases.

C. The supervisor must inform the volunteer of the working conditions and environment in which services are to be performed. Upon acceptance of an agreed upon assignment, the volunteer must assure the supervisor of the physical capability to carry out the duties involved. See Chapter 1, Paragraph 4, of this *Handbook* for discussion related to minors.

2. **Security Investigation.** Volunteers are subject to at least a minimum of a fingerprint check if they will be working less than 180 days. A successful fingerprint check will allow the volunteer to obtain a temporary access badge. If the volunteer will be working more than 180 days, please contact your Security Office at: <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/security/oso.html>. Staff in the Security Office will advise and provide the necessary security forms to be completed.

3. **Use of Government-Owned or -Leased Vehicles.** Volunteers may operate Government-owned or -leased sedans/vans/trucks if they possess a valid State driver's license, are at least 18 years of age, and complete the 8-hour Defensive Driving Training via DOI Learn. The supervisor should review the nature of the services that will be contributed by the volunteer to determine whether the volunteer needs to operate Government vehicles. If so, the supervisor must instruct the volunteer on the requirements of SM 409.1, Personal Property – Vehicle Management, and the USGS *Occupational Safety and Health Program Requirements Handbook*, SM 445-2-H, Chapter 16, Motor Vehicle Safety, both providing the volunteer with requirements and rules governing the official use of Government-owned or -leased vehicles and ensure that all procedures are followed. Under no circumstances may minor volunteers be assigned to operate vehicles owned by the Government.

A. Under some circumstances a foreign citizen who meets the conditions for volunteer service with the USGS and who does not possess a valid State driver's license but does possess an international driver's license may be permitted to drive a Government-owned vehicle. For specific guidance, consult the Department of Motor Vehicles in the State where the volunteer will be operating the vehicle.

4. **Attendance Schedules.** The attendance schedules of volunteers are not subject to the same limitations or restrictions that apply to USGS employees. A volunteer's schedule may be irregular and intermittent or a volunteer may also contribute a one-time service.

A. The number of hours contributed must be recorded in the OF-301A database. This bookkeeping requirement is particularly important in the event of injury compensation or tort claims and serves as validation of the hours contributed to the USGS.

5. **Equipment, Materials, and Supplies.** In most cases, volunteers should use Government-furnished equipment, materials, and supplies that are generally available to employees. However, when determined necessary by the supervisor and approved by the appropriate office official, equipment, materials, and supplies needed for the accomplishment of volunteer assignments may be purchased using normal procurement procedures.

Controlled property and equipment should remain the supervisor's responsibility. Although a volunteer may use controlled property and equipment under the same guidelines as USGS employees, a volunteer may not serve as property custodian or have controlled property placed under his or her name.

6. **Temporary Identification Passes.** Volunteers who have no other appropriate form of Government identification may be issued temporary identification passes. See SM 440.1, Identification Cards/Building Passes, for instructions about obtaining this card.

7. **Parking.** The same procedures as required of employees should be used to obtain parking permits for volunteers. See SM 429.7, Parking Management.

8. **Government Charge Cards.** The same procedures as required of employees should be used to obtain Government charge cards for volunteers.

## CHAPTER 7. FORMS

1. **Volunteer Services Agreement for Natural Resources Agencies (OF-301A).** The OF-301A is the document that officially establishes the individual as a volunteer who is providing services to the USGS. The agreement must be completed and signed by both the volunteer and the appropriate supervisor or USGS official before the individual can perform any volunteer services for the USGS. The agreement must include a brief description of the services to be performed and disclosure of any hazardous conditions or other situations that may affect a volunteer's health or safety. This form must also be completed for USGS employees who wish to volunteer. The OF-301A is listed in Webforms under the section titled "Other Forms."

2. **Emergency Care for Minors.** To ensure that immediate emergency medical care is provided, when necessary, to a volunteer under age 18, a parent or guardian of every minor volunteer must complete and sign the Emergency Care for Minor section of the Individual Volunteer Services Agreement, OF-301A. Note that the signatures of both parents or guardians are preferred. Every attempt must be made to contact the parent or guardian immediately in the event of a medical emergency. However, when the parent or guardian cannot be reached, the Emergency Care for Minor form authorizes medical professionals to begin treatment deemed necessary for the well-being of the minor. The form also

provides information on medical and health conditions about the volunteer that may be relevant to the supervisor in assigning work. The original form must accompany the minor when seeking emergency care. Supervisors must have the form within reach in offices, laboratories, or field sites when utilizing the services of volunteers under the age of 18 years. This form is available at: <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/hro/recruit/minorchildcare.pdf>.

3. **Job Hazard Analysis (JHA).** JHA's are required to prevent unnecessary exposure to job-related hazards and are conducted prior to performing any high hazard activities. JHA's assist in analysis of operational activities and individual jobs to document by identifying: the sequence of work, the hazards associated with the sequence, and the methods or safeguards to prevent, reduce, and/or control the identified hazard(s). For examples, see: <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/safetynet/jhamaster.html>.

## CHAPTER 8. RECOGNITION

1. **Types of Recognition.** Volunteers donate their services without pay and receive no monetary reward for their contributions. Their "reward" often comes in the form of a feeling of accomplishment and a sense of belonging. Volunteers take pride in their contributions and association with the USGS. A successful volunteer supervisor knows this and keeps morale and productivity high, making volunteers feel wanted and a part of the working team by praising them for work well done, by showing them how their specific work helps the USGS achieve its goals, and by giving them special recognition. Although volunteers cannot receive the monetary and honorary awards established for USGS employees, supervisors can provide them with recognition through personal interaction and feedback such as the following:

A. *Thank You.* A simple, sincere, and frequent verbal thank you is probably the most important form of recognition.

B. *Letters of Appreciation.* A thank you letter is always a welcome show of appreciation.

C. *Letters of Recommendation.* Many students and young professionals serve as volunteers. Managers and supervisors should be prepared to supply letters of recommendation as the volunteers apply for jobs.

D. *Letters of Commendation.* With the permission of the volunteers, supervisors should send letters to employers commending the volunteers' work. Many employers encourage their employees to volunteer and will appreciate the report. In the case of students, a letter of commendation to their college department heads would be appreciated.

E. *Non-Monetary Awards.* Volunteers may be granted non-monetary awards, including imprinted T-shirts and hats. These items are stocked in the USGS Self-Service Store at the National Center.

## CHAPTER 9. RECORDKEEPING AND REPORTING

1. **Individual Volunteer Data.** The USGS is required to keep a database of its volunteers. The database is found in WebForms, and the information is subject to the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. 552a). The information collected is used to verify participation in the Volunteer for Science Program for employment or other purposes, establish the volunteer's eligibility under the Federal Employees Compensation Act and the Federal Tort Claims Act, and facilitate emergency contact, if necessary. In addition, the volunteer database maintains the number of hours donated by each volunteer and expenses relating to the volunteer.

2. **Procedures.** To ensure that volunteer data are current and accurate, the following procedures are recommended:

A. *Project Supervisor.*

(1) Completes the Volunteer Services Agreement, OF-301A, online in WebForms under "Other Forms." The project supervisor must provide a thorough description of the volunteer's project, inform the volunteer of any special health or safety considerations, and when applicable, obtain approval from the appropriate Area or Headquarters Operational Support or Specialized Program Safety Officer. Upon completion of the OF-301A, the project supervisor will sign the form where indicated as the Government representative. The volunteer will sign the OF-301A when the individual reports for work. JHA's will be maintained locally along with approved waiver requests for exceptions to minor volunteers performing potentially hazardous work.

(2) Verifies the volunteer's number of hours donated each quarter.

(3) Authorizes reimbursement of volunteer's allowable expenditures.

(4) Forwards a copy of the terminated agreement to the office volunteer coordinator when the volunteer's service has ended.

B. *Office Volunteer Coordinator.*

(1) Assures that the volunteer database is kept up-to-date by ensuring that the volunteer services agreements are in the database and hours and expenditures are documented.

(2) Maintains a timesheet of hours donated and the date of the service to ensure coverage in case of injury and to verify creditable experience for employment purposes and records the hours in the volunteer database.

(3) Reports allowable reimbursable expenditures according to established procedures and enters them into the volunteer database.

## **CHAPTER 10. PROGRAM DATA**

1. **Reports.** Complete detailed reports describing volunteer efforts and results are submitted to Interior by the USGS Volunteer Coordinator annually at the end of the fiscal year.

## **CHAPTER 11. ANNOUNCING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

Opportunities for volunteers may be announced on [www.volunteer.gov/gov](http://www.volunteer.gov/gov). Office volunteer coordinators (or administrative staff) may input the opportunity directly onto the Web site by obtaining a password from the USGS Volunteer Coordinator. Information posted includes the opportunity name, location, position description, level of difficulty, and dates of service. Additional information can be found on the Web site.