

## Working in high hazard areas

1. NERC (Swindon Office; and its Research Centres)<sup>1</sup> conducts risk assessment of all of its work in accordance with health and safety legislation (Regulation 3 of the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations, 1999). This paper refers solely to Health & Safety risk.
2. A NERC level 'high risk' is defined as any primary, or unmitigated risk that has an impact score in excess of 70 and/or a risk exposure score (impact x probability) in excess of 49, in line with NERC Risk Management Strategy. All activities involving such 'high risk' will be documented and accompanied by a mitigation strategy, with control mechanisms and actions. The NERC Health & Safety Adviser will be asked to comment on the effectiveness of mitigation strategies for activities that have a high health & safety risk.
3. On occasions, areas of work with high hazard ratings are identified and totally reliable risk mitigation/management methods cannot be implemented. In such cases, all such potential projects are listed on the corporate Risk Register and require high level management discussion of the issues before a decision is made on whether to proceed. Normally, such discussion will take place at Research Centre management committee level, but on advice from the NERC Health & Safety Adviser, the final decision might be referred to and be taken at NERC Executive Board level.
4. Such projects with a high residual (or post mitigation) risk would only be undertaken if a "higher level" justification was identified. Higher level justification could include pressing scientific or policy need (for example working on active volcanoes where the need to predict future eruptions has implications for protecting lives) or substantial benefit to local communities in areas of political unrest or under-development.
5. Higher level justification is only applied where substantial mitigation or management of identified risk is possible and where no alternative, lower risk alternatives are available. It is not blanket overriding of the risk assessment process.
6. When a decision to proceed with such projects is made by the Research Centre management committee and/or the Executive Board, it will always be subject to potentially affected staff being:
  - made fully aware of the risk assessment, the risk management proposed and the residual risks identified
  - given access to all reports and discussion papers on the issue
  - fully informed of the uncertainties in the risk assessment
  - told that the work will only be undertaken on a volunteer basis
  - given the option to withdraw if their personal view of their safety changes
  - reassured that regular review will be made of the risks and that they will be informed immediately of any change in the information or perception of the risk
7. Staff should be reassured that no pressure will be applied by management to either participate in 'high risk' activities, or not participate, and that there will be no adverse effects on career prospects either way. Any staff who believe they are being pressurised should first contact their Research Centre Director, and if concerns still remain, inform another member of the NERC

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<sup>1</sup> Collaborative centres and other organisations receiving substantial NERC funding can use this as a guide as to whether they should inform NEB of any NERC-funded activities that may fall into these categories.

Executive Board or the Chief Executive and/or Union Representatives (whether or not a Union member).

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