

# MS 270 Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security

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**Effective Date:** October 1, 2019

**Responsible Office:** Office of Safety and Security and the Office for Global Operations

**Supersedes:** 05/07/18; 09/01/13; 07/18/12; 04/16/12; 12/20/10; 12/03/07; 11/15/99

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## Issuance Memo

Issuance memo (12/03/2007)

Issuance Memo (04/16/2012)

Issuance Memo (07/18/2012)

Issuance Memo (08/30/2013)

Issuance Memo (05/07/2018)

Issuance Memo (10/01/2019)

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## **1.0 Purpose**

The purpose of this manual section is to set out the Peace Corps' policy on the safety and security of Volunteers and Trainees (V/Ts) overseas, the roles and responsibilities of the parties who participate in the safety and security of V/Ts, and the specific actions and activities that the parties must take to promote the safety and security of the V/Ts.

## **2.0 Policy**

The safety and security of V/Ts is a paramount objective of the Peace Corps and is the responsibility of the Peace Corps staff and the V/Ts.

The Peace Corps manages its safety and security responsibilities through two of its major agency offices: the Office of Safety and Security, which directs, oversees, and supports the safety and security programs at Peace Corps, and the Office of Global Operations, which manages and supervises the V/Ts through Regional Directors (RDs) and Country Directors (CDs) located at Peace Corps posts throughout the world. The Office of Safety and Security establishes the general safety and security programs for the Peace Corps, while the Office of Global Operations has responsibility for ensuring implementation of these programs at post.

The Peace Corps safety and security program is based upon the following factors:

- (a) the recognition that Volunteers are generally safest and most productive when they establish strong ties to their community and develop an effective support network;
- (b) the need for staff and V/Ts to take actions to reduce the likelihood of adverse events or reducing the impact of such events; and
- (c) the necessity of having plans in place to respond promptly and effectively to threats or events.

The centerpiece of the Peace Corps safety and security program is the Volunteer safety and security support system (*see Section 3.2.4*), which is developed for each post by its CD, in conjunction with the Region and the Office of Safety and Security. The Peace Corps safety and security strategy is described in the technical guidance referenced in Section 9.

## **3.0 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **3.1 Office of Safety and Security**

#### **3.1.1 Associate Director for Safety and Security**

The Office of Safety and Security is headed by an Associate Director who exercises management and supervision of the safety and security program for V/Ts through its Overseas Operations. The Associate Director for Safety and Security also coordinates with the Associate Director for Global Operations on V/T safety and security issues.

#### **3.1.2 Chief of Overseas Operations**

Overseas Operations is headed by the Chief of Overseas Operations who reports to the Associate Director of Safety and Security. The Chief is in charge of Peace Corps safety and security programs for overseas operations and manages the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officers, who are assigned to various geographical regions. The Chief is responsible for developing the V/T safety and security programs, ensuring proper implementation of the programs, and maintaining communication with the Associate Director for Global Operations and the Regional Directors regarding V/T safety and security issues. Overseas Operations also establishes performance standards and provides technical oversight for the safety and security positions assigned to the Office of Global Operations. Overseas Operations, in collaboration with the Regions, will develop the framework for safety and security training to be provided to V/Ts.

#### **3.1.3 Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer**

The Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO), assigned to particular posts in a Region, is responsible for assisting the posts to implement safety and security programs. The PCSSO reports to the Chief of Overseas Operations. The responsibilities of the PCSSO include:

- (a) Serving as a security advisor and consultant to Country Directors;
- (b) Providing technical oversight on the work performed by the Safety and Security Managers and Assistants;
- (c) Conducting reviews of posts' safety and security programs and making recommendations for improvements, as needed;
- (d) Reviewing the implementation of recommendations made to posts;
- (e) Mentoring and training post staff;
- (f) Participating in hiring, evaluation, and retention of post safety and security staff;
- (g) Conducting security and risk assessments;
- (h) Analyzing data and information from a variety of sources to forecast possible impacts on post operations;

- (i) Providing crisis management support; and
- (j) Coordinating actions in support of V/T crime victims.

## **3.2 Office of Global Operations**

### **3.2.1 Associate Director for Global Operations**

The Office of Global Operations is headed by an Associate Director who is responsible for the management of the geographical Regions where Peace Corps V/Ts are located. One major managerial responsibility of the Associate Director is the safety and security of the V/Ts. The Associate Director performs this responsibility through the RDs and CDs. The Associate Director also coordinates with the Associate Director for Safety and Security on V/T safety and security issues.

### **3.2.2 Regional Director**

The RD is responsible for ensuring that CDs in the Region have established and are effectively managing their Volunteer safety and security support systems in accordance with the guidelines established by the Peace Corps. The RD coordinates with the Chief of Overseas Operations and relevant PCSSOs on safety and security issues. The RD must also ensure that posts in the Region are taking corrective actions to address issues related to safety and security that have been identified during assessments and evaluations and that have been mutually agreed upon by the Office of Safety and Security and the RD. The RD is responsible for ensuring that corrective actions are taken, monitoring the progress of the corrective actions, and keeping the Chief of Overseas Operations advised of the status of corrective actions.

### **3.2.3 Regional Security Advisor**

The Regional Security Advisor (RSA) for a Region reports to the RD and serves as a security advisor. The RSA is responsible for coordinating the Region's safety and security activities and serving as the liaison between Region, posts, PCSSOs, and the Chief of Overseas Operations. The RSA coordinates with key players on the broad range of security concerns and assists CDs and their staff with the implementation of their Volunteer safety and security support systems. The Office of Safety and Security provides technical oversight of the work performed by the RSAs. Responsibilities of the RSA include:

- (a) Advising regional management on all security related issues, including priorities, strategies and trends;
- (b) Conducting secondary source threat analysis and monitoring and assisting the Region in making strategic and operational decisions to mitigate emerging security threats;
- (c) Serving as the Region's point of contact for all security related issues;
- (d) Coordinating the Region's safety and security activities and communications with the Office of Safety and Security;

- (e) Managing information flow surrounding safety and security policy and procedures;
- (f) Providing crisis management support;
- (g) Serving as the Region's point of contact for continuity of operations and continuity of government (COOP) planning and exercises;
- (h) Ensuring that the Office of Safety and Security is informed about Regional concerns related to security incidents or crimes against Volunteers;
- (i) Resolving issues in relation to the implementation of PCSSO recommendations; and
- (j) Maintaining a general knowledge of the Region's safety and security strategies and trends.

### **3.2.4 Country Director**

The Country Director (CD) has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management and execution of safety and security programs at the post. The CD is responsible for establishing, overseeing, and managing the post Volunteer Safety and Security Support System, which includes:

- (a) The monitoring of the security environment and communication of information to V/Ts;
- (b) Training of V/Ts;
- (c) Ensuring that Volunteer sites meet established criteria;
- (d) Establishing procedures for responding to V/T security incidents; and
- (e) Plans for emergencies.

The CD is in charge of developing post-specific policies and procedures that implement this manual section and all other safety and security guidelines established by Peace Corps.

The CD is responsible for notifying the Region of the resources necessary to implement the post's Volunteer Safety and Security Support System.

The CD is responsible for the hiring, evaluation, and retention of post security staff, in consultation with the relevant PCSSO.

If a V/T is the victim of a crime, the CD is responsible for ensuring that appropriate support is provided to the victim. In addition, the CD must ensure that necessary follow-up actions are taken, especially if a criminal investigation and prosecution ensues. In such a situation, the CD must keep the relevant PCSSO and the RSA informed and, where appropriate, the Office of Inspector General.

The CD is also responsible for maintaining regular contact with the U.S. Embassy on security concerns and must keep the Regional Security Officer at the embassy informed of crimes

involving V/Ts. The CD serves as Peace Corps' representative on the Embassy Emergency Action Committee.

Notwithstanding the forgoing, the only specific responsibilities of the CD, relating to the safety and security of a V/T who has made a restricted report of a sexual assault, are those that are set out in MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault*.

### **3.2.5 Safety and Security Manager**

The Safety and Security Manager (SSM) reports to the CD and is responsible for the overall coordination of the post's Volunteer safety and security support system and must collaborate closely with other staff to ensure that all required components of the Volunteer safety and security support system are operational and are being properly executed. The Office of Safety and Security, through Overseas Operations and the relevant PCSSO, provides technical oversight over the work performed by the SSM.

### **3.3 Volunteer/Trainees**

Service in the Peace Corps entails certain safety and security risks that are commensurate with living and traveling in an unfamiliar and potentially more dangerous environment overseas. *See MS 204 Volunteer Conduct* and *MS 284 Early Termination of Service*. Consequently, safety and security is the responsibility of each V/T, who is responsible for the following:

- (a) Adopting lifestyles that support community integration, promote safety, minimize risk, and are sensitive to, and are consistent with, host country cultural norms.
- (b) Exercising good judgment at all times to promote safety and to reduce risks at home, work, and while traveling.
- (c) Participating in safety and security training and learning and following the specific safety and security policies, procedures and rules at post.
- (d) In addition, V/Ts are strongly encouraged to report safety and security incidents and concerns to post staff and to use the Standard Reporting process to maximize the provision of support services.

## **4.0 Monitoring the Security Environment and Disseminating Security Information**

Each post must keep V/Ts informed of the potential safety and security risks they may face, both before their departure and throughout the course of their service. Accurate, comprehensive, and timely information is necessary in order for V/Ts to take steps to minimize those risks.

To ensure that safety and security information is current and relevant, each post must conduct assessments of threats and vulnerabilities that determine potential adverse impacts on V/Ts, Peace Corps operations, and personnel. The formal assessments will:

- (a) Be led by the PCSSO at least once every five years and be updated annually by post staff to reflect new information;
- (b) Address such topics as natural disasters, civil unrest, political instability, crime, transnational conflict, terrorism, environmental hazards, explosive remnants of war, public health threats, and transportation disasters;
- (c) Include analysis of crime incidents affecting V/Ts;
- (d) Define how risks would likely have an impact on V/Ts, staff, and Peace Corps operations and how Peace Corps would respond.

## **5.0 Training**

Each post must provide V/Ts with a program of ongoing safety and security training within the framework established by the Office of Safety and Security. The training will be designed to increase V/T's awareness of their in-country environment, build their capacity to cope effectively with the many challenges they will face, and provide the tools to adopt a safe and appropriate lifestyle. The training must promote a realistic understanding of the possibility of accident, crime, disaster, injury, psychological trauma, and loss of property during service. It must help V/Ts recognize factors that contribute to those risks and encourage compliance with Peace Corps policy. The training must be designed to instill attitudes consistent with adopting a culturally appropriate lifestyle and practicing measures expected to reduce risk.

Each post must ensure that V/T safety and security training:

- (a) Conforms to the agency's training design and evaluation process; and
- (b) Is integrated into language, technical, cross-cultural, health, and other aspects of training where such integration is beneficial.

## **6.0 Site Development and Monitoring**

The quality of a Volunteer's site, housing, and work assignment is a critical feature of a safe Volunteer experience. Each post must ensure that Volunteer sites, housing, and work assignments are appropriate and meet all Peace Corps and post-established criteria.

### **6.1 Site Development Process**

Each post must establish and apply a process for developing, selecting, and approving sites that meet the criteria set forth in this manual section. *See sections 6.2 – 6.6.*

### **6.2 Site Selection Criteria**

Each post must develop and apply criteria for the selection and approval of sites. Criteria should address work role, potential for integration, living arrangements, vulnerability to natural disasters, communication, transportation, access to essential health care and other support

services, security climate, and consent of host authorities. Also, each post must review the site history, if there is any. Evaluation of the site and satisfaction of site selection criteria must be documented by the post.

### **6.3 Communications Standards**

All sites will be developed in order to allow for adequate communication between Volunteers and post. V/Ts must have access during the course of a day to a reliable means of communication. Acceptable means of communication include, but are not limited to, phone, cell phone, email, text message, 2-way radio, or vehicle. The post must be able to communicate with every V/T site, under normal circumstances, within a 24-hour period.

### **6.4 Housing Standards**

All V/T housing or host family arrangements must be inspected by post staff (or a trained designee) prior to occupancy to ensure each house and/or homestay arrangement meets all minimum standards as established by the Peace Corps and the post. Reports of the inspections must be documented and maintained by the post.

### **6.5 Community Orientation**

Each post must provide host communities, host families, counterparts, and local officials with an appropriate orientation in order to promote more welcoming communities, more supportive counterparts and authorities, and better-defined roles. Orientation for host families and counterparts must include information about the awareness and prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment, in accordance with Safety and Security Instruction (SSI) 420 *Guidance for Host Family and Counterpart Orientation/Information on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment*.

### **6.6 Volunteer Site Visits**

Each post must establish protocols and schedules for periodic staff visits with Volunteers in their sites to monitor and address issues related to work assignments, living arrangements, adaptation, and security. Reports of visits must be documented and maintained by the post.

### **6.7 Site History Documentation**

Each post must develop a process and maintain a system for recording the history of a site from the time that initial evaluation begins (See SSI 401 *Site History Files*). The site history must capture security issues that could affect future Volunteer placements in particular areas. Information should include Volunteer concerns about a location, safety or security incidents that occur in the community, and other conditions that could otherwise affect a future decision to place a Volunteer in that location or to provide funds or other benefits to site locations such as projects, camps, or visitation from Volunteers.



## **6.8 Site Safety**

### **6.8.1 Post Initiated Action**

- (a) When a post becomes aware of a situation that presents, or is likely to present, a threat to the well-being of a Volunteer, the post must take action in accordance with Safety and Security Instruction 202 (SSI 202).
- (b) The actions that the post must take pursuant to SSI 202 may include removal of a Volunteer from a site pending an assessment and evaluation of the safety of the site.

### **6.8.2 Volunteer Initiated Action**

- (a) Volunteers are responsible for reporting any safety or security concerns about their site to post staff.
- (b) A Volunteer who feels at risk of imminent bodily harm at his or her site may request to be removed from such site. When such a request is made by a Volunteer, the post must remove the Volunteer from the site as expeditiously as practicable, even if the post has a different opinion of site safety at the time of the Volunteer's request. The post must conduct an assessment and evaluation of the safety of the site before making a determination that it is safe for the Volunteer to return to the site. If the post determines the site to be safe, the post may, if the Volunteer agrees, return the Volunteer to the site. All assessments and evaluations must be documented in the site history.
- (c) Until the post determines the site to be safe, no other Volunteers should be assigned to or allowed to visit the site. However, other Volunteers already at the site may remain until completion of the assessment and evaluation of the safety of the site.
- (d) If the post determines that a site is unsafe for any other Volunteers, all Volunteers remaining at the site must be removed from the site as expeditiously as practicable.
- (e) A Volunteer who is removed from a site and is unable or unwilling to return to the site may be eligible for a reassignment or transfer under MS 282. If such a reassignment or transfer is not possible, the Country Director may determine that the Volunteer should be separated with interrupted service status in accordance with MS 284.

## **7.0 Volunteer Incident Management**

Each post must establish specific procedures for V/Ts to report incidents, as well as procedures for how post will receive and respond to such incidents.

These procedures must reflect a victim-centered response that ensures:

- (a) V/Ts receive appropriate and timely support to assist in addressing physical, emotional, financial, and legal needs, in addition to immediate security concerns.

- (b) Information is disseminated promptly to the Peace Corps staff that needs to act promptly in support of the V/T.
- (c) Sensitive information about a V/T incident is only shared as permitted by Peace Corps privacy policy.
- (d) Posts review and analyze victimization trends and use this information to improve training, better allocate resources, and make other program adjustments.
- (e) V/Ts are encouraged to report safety and security incidents.

## **8.0 Emergency Planning and Communication**

### **8.1 Emergency Action Plan**

Each post must develop and maintain a detailed Emergency Action Plan (EAP) that addresses the most likely emergency situations that would impact Peace Corps personnel and operations. The EAP must follow the agency's standard format to detail country-specific issues and procedures. The EAP must contain a mechanism for collecting and maintaining accurate and redundant means for communicating with V/Ts. It must be revised annually to incorporate lessons-learned from EAP tests and new information from security assessments.

### **8.2 Emergency Action Plan Training and Testing**

The CD will assure that post staff and V/Ts are trained in the EAP and in individual EAP responsibilities. Each post must conduct regular testing of its EAP in order to prepare staff and V/Ts to react properly in an emergency, and to determine if procedures described in the EAP are appropriate. The testing must conform to the standards and protocols established by the agency.

### **8.3 Whereabouts Reporting Requirement**

*Whereabouts Reporting* is a core component of the Peace Corps' emergency preparedness and response program requiring all V/Ts to report their whereabouts every time they are away from site overnight (without exception) and when they return to site to ensure their safety and security. The *Whereabouts Reporting Requirement* is an essential function in order to locate and contact V/Ts quickly, in the event of a crisis or emergency. In order to maximize V/T's safety and security during a crisis or emergency, each post must establish a post-specific *Whereabouts Reporting Policy* that includes a system to collect V/T whereabouts and contact information whenever V/Ts are away from site overnight for personal travel, annual leave, or official reasons. Each Post must review its post-specific whereabouts reporting policy annually and, as part of that review, solicit and address comments on the policy from PCVs and relevant post staff. (For additional information, see MS 270 – Attachment A – *Whereabouts Reporting Template*.)

#### **8.3.1 Use of Whereabouts Reporting at Post**

The whereabouts collection system, as mentioned above in section 8.3, is separate from other systems used to keep track of leave balances.

For purposes of the emergency preparedness and response program, a post may only review *Whereabouts Reporting* information within the collection system to verify V/T compliance with the post's specific *Whereabouts Reporting Policy* and failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including administrative separation. Posts are not authorized to use *Whereabouts Reporting* as a measurement of individual V/T's performance at site, time in site, or to track a V/T's annual leave.

## **9.0 Technical Guidance**

The Office of Safety and Security will draft, distribute, and maintain technical guidance under the authority of this manual section to prescribe how its policy components must be implemented. Such technical guidance will be effective and binding on staff and V/Ts when approved by the Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations and the Office of the General Counsel.

## **10.0 Effective Date**

The effective date is the date of issuance.