



SEA SEMESTER
at Woods Hole and at Sea

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FROM: David Bank, Director of Marine Operations

RE: SEA Semester Safety Practices and Risk Management

Sea Education Association (SEA) and its associated programs fully recognize the significant responsibility for training and housing young people at our campus in Woods Hole, MA and for taking them to sea. For nearly forty years, SEA has thoughtfully and continuously honed its safety policies and procedures to minimize risk to program participants and personnel while achieving programmatic goals. Perhaps because SEA was founded by experienced mariners, there exists a climate throughout our organization that promotes safety awareness and prudent decision making. Although SEA takes pride in our safety record, we continuously monitor and assess our training, personnel, policies, and equipment to maintain safety as a priority within our programs and operations.

SEA maintains a philosophy of prevention but we prepare for and are capable of a broad spectrum of response. On shore, the student body never exceeds fifty-four persons. All students live on campus in our dormitories, which are supervised by a Head Resident. Their behavior and conduct is monitored and must meet our established code of conduct. Students are continuously assessed for maturity and responsibility and those deviating from acceptable behavior are not allowed to participate in the sea component. In addition, students are prepared during the shore component for emergence into the setting of the sea where prevention is the best defense. At sea, the staff to student ratio is approximately 1:2. Our professional staff receives safety and medical training and performs regular drills. Our vessels are equipped with all necessary equipment for navigation and emergency situations, and we have medical response plans that include use of Medical Advisory Systems (<http://www.mas1.com/>) and Divers Alert Network (<http://www.diversalertnetwork.org/>). At-sea communications with program staff include high seas radio, satellite telephones, and limited email capability.

We are conservative and proactive in our risk management strategy. Unlike some other programs that take students to sea, our ships are US flagged, inspected and regulated vessels, and they have been designed and built specifically for us with student and crew safety foremost in mind. Our ships are United States Coast Guard certified and regularly inspected for ocean service; in addition, our vessels are voluntarily inspected to meet or surpass stringent naval and safety standards by the American Bureau of Shipping. In fact, SEA takes a leadership role in the world of sail training regulation and championed the creation of the legal classification that our ships now fall under, that of Sailing School Vessel (SSV). As such, our students are considered “crew members” and expected to act accordingly, with associated education and training to be an active part of the risk

prevention and response team. Undergraduate students completing our Ocean Exploration program receive up to 106 days of sea service credit towards a Coast Guard credential, in recognition of both their onshore and at-sea preparation and training. As an organization, SEA voluntarily subjects itself to external and internal safety audits, and we hold professional safety training forums on emergency systems, heavy weather avoidance, and even in-field psychological assessment.

Our sailing locations are designed well in advance to optimize program objectives and are based on seasonal weather patterns, sea conditions, oceanographic research clearances and port calls visited. First and foremost, we consider weather; our cruise track selection and timing reflects strict adherence to predictable heavy weather avoidance.

Additionally, as one of the largest requestors of research clearances, we maintain a strong and positive relationship with the U.S. Department of State. Finally, because we have at most 27 students aboard our vessels, we select port calls that are small, easily monitored and of a manageable size but that also provide students an opportunity to interact with the local culture. In truth, student off-ship time is very limited; we normally spend 2-3 days in 1-2 foreign ports over a six-week sea component, but students tend to spend less than half that time off the vessel since all nights are spent back on board ship. Their exposure to the most common hazards of study abroad programs, such as traffic accidents, sexual assault and harassment, use and abuse of drugs or alcohol, and exposure to disease and illness in a host country (Van der Werf, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. LIII, 2007; *Safety Abroad First Educational Travel Information*, <http://www.globaled.us>) is therefore much more limited than most. Students are accountable for maintaining our code of conduct while on foreign soil, which because of their crewmember “on watch” status includes restricted alcohol use and zero-tolerance for non-prescription drugs.

In summary, safety awareness and risk management is in the very fabric of short- and long-term decision making at Sea Education Association. We have a long history of personal safety that reflects our vigilant attendance to risk minimization. Unquestionably, our students spend six weeks in a wilderness setting, but it is highly managed and structured by licensed professional mariners and educators 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Should you require additional information, we would be happy to elaborate on any or all aspects of our program and risk management policies and actions.