

UNOLS Safety Committee Meeting Notes

5 May 2026

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Call Meeting to Order, introductions – Doug Russell and Jon Swallow

- UNOLS Code of Conduct – Doug Reviewed
- Safety Committee terms of reference and membership – Jon Reviewed / provided slides.

Safety committee actions since April 2025 meeting – Jon Swallow (see slides)

- New members
- New Safety Chair email (safetychair@unols.org)
- Dive Safety Subcommittee established
- App B – waived compliance for OHS < 1000lb breaking strength (NBL)
- App A – wire termination SOPs and testing (full compliance by 1/01/2028)
- Review (ongoing) of RVSS Harassment Prevention Sections
- Safety Chair / Safety Committee members meeting at RVTEC

Safety Manager position update – Doug Russell

- Doug reviewed that this is on hold while NSF funding is unknown given the current federal funding situation with the Executive Branch proposing a 40% cut to the Academic Research Fleet in the 2027 budget.
- A position description and job advertisement have been created for a new position within the UW system should funding become available.

High Voltage Electrical Safety – Erich Gruebel

- How can we increase awareness of hazards and improve training? – The Safety Committee to investigate creating a work group to work on revising RVSS Section 15.5.
- Also, RVTEC to look at assessing the state of and the possible need for training to ensure technicians have Fundamental Electrical Testing Skillsets.
- There was also a suggestion for having ETO Training Cruises conducted onboard ships that are transiting between science cruises.
- Update or retract RVS 2014-1 Safety Bulletin – UNOLS to investigate how to do this.

Lithium Battery Safety

- A general discussion occurred regarding different methods used for dealing with lithium battery fires.
- WHOI shared that they have dedicated Lithium Battery storage cabinets onboard Neil Armstrong and Atlantis.
- Blake Powell indicated that there are plenty of examples of bad lithium battery storage solutions in the ARF. He also indicated the USCG advocates using water mist, spray and/or flooding for addressing hot / runaway lithium battery fires.
- Some noted that batteries are jettisoned if hot/runaway while there was also note of using expanded glass beads for addressing such situations.
- Operators were encouraged to share Lithium Battery safety info with Jon Swallow and Alice Doyle.

RVSS Chapter 6.1.4, App E, & “Harassment Reporting Best Practices” – Tara Clemente

- Tara provided a presentation (see slides) on the Harassment Reporting guidance she has drafted and is seeking feedback on as well as proposed updates to the Chapter 6 – Personal Conduct and Appendix E of the RVSS.
- Considerable discussion followed regarding best ways to address this with crew and science parties.
- It was noted that the Module III Harassment Reporting Posters may need updating and should be posted in all private areas (i.e. staterooms, heads) in addition to public areas.
- It was also suggested that Captains and Chief Scientists may need training on how to receive and process harassment/assault reports.
- The UNOLS Harassment video should also be reviewed to see if it should be updated especially to ensure reporting best practices are emphasized.
- Do we need to update Module II?
 - Refresh Scenarios
 - Cameras onboard?

Recommendation:

- Chi Sci have a group watch and discussion?
- Emphasis on reporting - who is available, resources, etc.
- Update Module III

Recommendation:

- Have a meeting between Captain and Chief Scientist

- Talk lines of communication, reporting, etc
- Set the tone early

Recommendation:

- Have a training workshop for Chief Scientists and Captains - how to handle the reporting of harassment / assault.

RVSS App B Refresher – What is and is not an OHS? What is required? - Aaron Davis

- Aaron provided slides and answered several questions.

Action: Update slides?

Action: New SOLAS recommendations

Recommendation: Making Appendix B more finite so folks can better understand it.

Action: Clarify section on labeling - Erich G and Aaron D

Hurdles to Appendix B

- Lots of hurdles stacked up next to each other
- Big issues with science winches - esp. Testing in port – there just isn't enough time. Especially if there isn't personnel available to do the manage and conduct the testing operations
 - Is there a way to get them compliant ahead of time?
- Can we remove D:d ratios?
 - d/d does not reduce safety - it reduces the life of the wire.
 - Level winds do not meet this requirement
- Make exceptions for certain classification societies - e.g. if it is OK for ABS, then it is OK for us.
- Extenuating circumstances plan - not clear of the intent. Ease it up?
 - This is where WHOI has fallen flat - too many options

Action: Make Aaron's documents available on Google Drive folder

Also sent out with pre-inspection documents

Action: D/d working group to be led by Erich and Josh

Action: If a person says they are bringing a winch - add some lingo and Self-Assessment

Action: Section B.7.1 - clarify

Overboard Handling System labeling requirements – How Clarify?

- Jon Swallow shared some different OHS labeling examples from his recent visit to SIO ships at the last RVTEC.
- Aaron Davis and Erich Gruebel will investigate clarifying labeling needs for the ARF.

Open discussion for other Appendix A and B topics

- There was discussion for the need to define Normal Working Tension

Waivers to the RVSS – UW request for permanent waiver – Greg Higgins / Winch and Wire Pools

- A permanent waiver for *R/V Thompson's* trawl winch for the side rollers not meeting the RVSS specified d/D ratio was approved while UW continues to investigate and assess possible solutions.
- The UNOLS Office will issue a letter to that effect.
- ECWP's Eric Trotto will investigate the impacts to wire strength/longevity if the current *R/V Thompson* side roller D:d ratio is not revised to meet current RVSS requirements.

RECOMMENDATION: Make a permanent waiver for the rollers

RECOMMENDATION: can we roll this into the investigation of D:d

- Can we add the diagram from W&W handbook - so that the operators can make their own calculations?

ACTION: Grant the waiver

VOTE: Permanent Letter said YES.

1200 – 1300 LUNCH

NOAA Ship *RON BROWN* and *RAINIER* fires – lessons learned – Julie Wagner

Julie reviewed both the RAINIER and RON BROWN engine room fire events. She provided slides related to the RAINIER fire.

RAINIER – it was a fire in the Engine Room Fidley (not a stack fire).

- The fire happened due to flammable materials stored in the Fidley.
- NOAA issued a number of directives / notices regarding corrective actions that resulted from the post-fire investigation.
- Julie agreed to provide UNOLS with the NOAA Corrective Actions so they can be shared with UNOLS ship operators.

RON BROWN – couldn't share much about details of the fire on the ship due to ongoing litigation.

- Julie shared important lessons from the Integrated Command Structure (ICS) perspective related to communicating with family/friends notifications to Emergency Contacts
- As well as dealing with post Fire issues such as where to take the ship, contracting for a shipyard to receive it
- Post-incident mental health support
- The ship had just completed ready for operations training prior to departing the shipyard. That training seemed to pay off with the excellent crew response to the fire.

Possible action item: look into requiring more comprehensive drills/tabletop exercises with the ship operators for major events such as these that include shoreside support, 3rd party providers (i.e. oil spill, ship grounding), etc. to verify processes, communications plans, etc.

ACTION: Each institution needs to do a tabletop with Wood O'Brien - figure out what they do and what the institutions should do.

- **Who calls the family?** Both were NOAA Corps officers
- What do the small operators do?

RECOMMENDATION: Small operators get together and discuss how they would handle this as a small operation with few staff.

- Changes in policies after the incident?
 - Biggest training in how to manage the damage control readiness, changing SCBA masks in fleet and were old & fit testing

How communicate Incident / Near Miss Lessons Learned to the Deck Plates – Jon Swallow

- Jon discussed the importance of ship operators sharing near miss information and then ensuring that the information makes it to the "deck plate" so it helps

the crew and marine technicians who operate the ships and make science happen.

- A variety of options were proposed by different folks on how this could be accomplished.
- UNOLS to investigate adding near misses to the Quarterly Safety Statistics Reports.
- Near Misses are now a topic for the regular Marine Superintendent Check-In Meetings.

ACTION: Add question to the Quarterly Safety Questionnaire - Categories?

ACTION: Look up Heinrich Accident Triangle

RECOMMENDATIONS: Have an award for the best quality.

ACTION: Create a form for near misses. - get copy of the WHOI form, look at VIMS form, also share with scientists.

2025 "Top Hits" from UNOLS Safety Reports and NSF Inspection Team – Jon and Blake

- Blake Powell reviewed some common issues identified by the NSF Inspection Team.
- The most prevalent and important noted was the need to make improvements in the Appendices A&B and the operators' Overboard Handling System Manuals to reflect how the systems are actually used.
 - Operators would be better served if their OHS manual includes a summary of the system. Not just individual elements.

Diving Subcommittee Update - Alice Doyle

- Alice provided an update on the sub-committee's work.
- There is a memo that captures the sub-committee's recommendations.
- The Safety Committee needs to review that memo and make recommendations to the RVOC.
- Add Pre-Cruise planning questions to MFP?

ACTION: Safety Committee to review the Recommendations and get back to WG - hopefully before the AAUS

RVSS Chapter 5.4.2 – Science Party Rest; update needed? – Jon Swallow

- Short discussion on situations where operators have noted that science parties have pushed the envelope on ensuring appropriate crew rest for the science teams.

- Ship Captains do have the authority to stop science operations when they are concerned that the science parties are not getting sufficient rest and therefore risking the safety of personnel and the ship.
- No additional action was deemed necessary except to addressing this topic in the pre-cruise safety brief with the science party.

Alcohol on ARF vessels clarification / reminder – Jon Swallow and Rose Dufour

- Short discussion on some recent events and whether the current RVSS language regarding the prohibition of serving/consuming alcohol onboard ARF vessels is sufficient.
 - There were no suggestions for changing the RVSS.

ACTION: Small working group to review and update marijuana policy.

Additional Topics, Open Discussion, and Recap of Key Action Items – Jon Swallow

No new topics were raised.

The meeting concluded at 1530.

Action Items:

1. Ensure the approved Apx A & B changes get onto RVSS master – Jon S/Alice
2. Write permanent waiver letter for UW – Doug R
3. High Voltage Workgroup – Erich G, Dave W, Emily Shimada?
 - a. How improve Tech/Crew knowledge of risk of HV hazards and mitigation etc. (training, pre cruise planning, PPE, etc.)
 - b. Recommendations for HV safety devices for the fleet (hv monitoring, insulators, meggars?,...
 - c. Reco electrical PPE for vessels
4. Remove HV safety bulletin from UNOLS site – Jon S.
5. Lithium Battery Safety – Should we post some Policies and Safety procedures somewhere for ARF to use as templates? - All

6. RVSS Ch 6 & Appdx E "Harassment" updates
 - a. assist Tara by reviewing content – All
 - b. Discuss what should be in RVSS vs. institution SMS or elsewhere – All
7. RVSSF Ch 11 "Dive Safety" sections – All (or volunteer subgroup)
 - a. Review Subcommittee recommendations
 - b. Assist with Action Plan for implementation of approved recommendations.
8. Explore ideas for collecting and disseminating Near Miss stories to the Fleet –
Jon S, Kerry S, Lindsay K,?:
 - a. Add to Safety Report, use slide template?
 - b. Review stats collected by institution with SMS near miss process (ie. WHOI).
 - c. Other ideas?
9. Next round of Appdx A and B changes ID'd at Safety Meeting :
 - a. NSF Insp Team top hits:
 - i. Review OHS Summary Section to clarify requirements
 - ii. Revise or remove "Extenuating Circumstances Plan" requirement
 - iii. Clarify "Labeling" section – JS and SMEs
 - b. Workgroup to revise d/d requirement for rollers – Erich, Josh, ?
 - i. Do we need to define different types of rollers?
 - ii. Provide SWT derate process for operators to do on their own?
 - iii. Change d/d ratio?
 - c. Revise "Initial Testing" to clarify SWT etc. – EG
 - d. Add clarifying language for an operation to prove compliance – Matt D, ?
 - e. Any sections need revision to match new SOLAS requirements? – Aaron?

- f. Any sections can be simplified to match ABS requirements? – Aaron?
10. Revise Ch 6 Marijuana sections to include Science Party and Contractors etc. –
Doug B.
1. Add UNOLS Council member Dan Ohnemus to Safety Committee as Ex-Officio Council.

 2. Update RVSS Ch 9 – “Unmanned Aerial Systems” in coordination with SCOAR (carry over from 2025 list).