

Research Vessel Harassment Reporting Best Practices

New guidance from the UNOLS Office
for the U.S. Academic Research Fleet



| The Challenge: **Unclear Reporting Guidance** Across the Fleet

Critical gaps identified at the last UNOLS Council Meeting



Multi-Institutional Complexity

A single cruise may involve crew, scientists, and students from different universities with different Title IX offices and reporting requirements



Confusion at Sea

Cruise participants are unclear of the available resources at sea when faced with a harassment situation



Variable Policies

Each operating institution maintains its own harassment reporting policies and expectations resulting in inconsistency across the fleet



Lack of Standardized Guidance

No consistent fleet-wide reporting framework. Inconsistent reporting procedures. Unclear reporting pathways.

Why This Guidance Is Needed



01 — JURISDICTIONAL COMPLEXITY

Multi-institutional crews create confusion about which entity receives and acts on reports



02 — REMOTE OPERATIONS

Research vessels operate in remote environments with limited access to shore-based support



03 — FEDERAL MANDATE

The Safer Seas Act (2022) created new USCG mandatory reporting obligations under 46 USC §10104



04 — POWER DYNAMICS

Academic hierarchies and power dynamics unique to shipboard science require clear protocols



05 — COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

UNOLS community commitment to creating safe & respectful research environments for all

The Purpose: Provide Harassment Reporting Guidance Across the Fleet



Clarifies roles and reporting pathways when multiple entities share responsibility - Who reports what, and to whom



Ensure compliance with federal and institutional obligations



Supports safe and respectful working environments at sea



Provide standardized guidance and coordination for reporting harassment across the U.S. Academic Research (ARF)

| Key Definitions

Understanding the terminology is essential for consistent reporting and response

Bullying: Repeated or severe conduct that is intimidating, degrading, humiliating, or abusive, and that interferes with an individual's ability to perform their work or participate in the research environment.

Harassment: Unwelcome conduct based on characteristics (such as sex, gender, race, national origin, religion, disability, or other protected categories) that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or learning environment.

Complainant: An individual who reports or is alleged to have experienced harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, bullying, or retaliation.

Respondent: An individual who is alleged to have engaged in harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, bullying, or retaliation.

Responsible Entity: An individual or office designated under law (e.g., 46 USC §10104, Safer Seas Act SEC. 11609) to receive, document, and report complaints or incidents of harassment, sexual harassment, or sexual assault aboard a research vessel. Responsible entities, such as the Captain or Marine Superintendent, ensure reports are made in accordance with federal law, institutional policies, and operational procedures, and may coordinate with HR, Title IX offices, and home institutions as appropriate.

ARF Vessel Conduct & Reporting Framework

UNOLS Civility at Sea Modules I, II and III

Provide a progressive framework that builds awareness, skills and accountability to foster respectful and safe working environments across all levels of the research vessel community

RVSS Chapter 6: Policy & Standards

What is required? Establishes required standards and legal compliance with Title IX, Title IIV, USCG, Safer Seas Act, ADA and maritime regulations. Requires harassment prevention and training policies, mandatory safety briefings, harassment prevention signage and policies, reporting systems.

KEY MESSAGE: Vessels must have compliant systems, policies and protections in place.

RVSS Appendix E: Culture & Behavior


How should we act? Defines expectations on board for conduct. Establishes shared language for civility, equity, inclusion and well as defines harassment and bullying. Reinforces bystander intervention, respectful communication and onboard social dynamics.

KEY MESSAGE: Everyone contributes to a safe and respectful environment

Research Vessel Harassment Reporting Best Practices: Operational Response

What happens when something occurs? Defines what happens when an incident occurs. Reporting pathways, roles and responsibilities, USCG reporting requirements, Interim safety measures and response procedures. Includes scenario-based workflows.

KEY MESSAGE: All reports must be documented, escalated and addressed through coordinated institutional and vessel processes

 Together, these pieces create a more complete system that brings together expectations, culture, and response

Dual Reporting Framework

TRACK 1

USCG / Federal Reporting

46 U.S.C. § 10104 — Safer Seas Act

- ✔ Mandatory under federal law when the responsible entity learns of a complaint or incident
- ✔ Triggered when the responsible entity learns of a complaint or incident
- ✔ Report immediately via the fastest telecommunications channel available

⚠ **Non-compliance penalty: up to \$50,000 civil penalty**

TRACK 2

Institutional / Employer Reporting

Title IX · HR · Policies

- ✔ Required by home institution policies (Title IX, HR)
- ✔ Applies to all personnel regardless of role onboard
- ✔ May trigger internal investigation, interim protective measures, and support services

🛡 **Activates support, accommodations & protective measures**

⚠ **Same Incident may require reporting through both Federal and institutional channels, which operate independently and in parallel.**

Roles and Responsibilities

Captain (Master of the Vessel)

- Overall authority for vessel safety and operations
- Ensures immediate response to safety concerns
- Implements interim measures onboard
- Serves as a federal reporting entity (USCG)

Chief Scientist

- Leads the scientific mission and onboard science team
- Promotes professional conduct within the science party
- Receives concerns and directs individuals to reporting channels
- Coordinates with vessel leadership when issues arise

Marine Superintendent / Vessel Operator

- Primary coordination point ashore
- Ensures compliance with federal reporting requirements (USCG)
- Connects vessel and individuals with home HR / Title IX offices
- Facilitates communication across institutions

Home Institutions

- **Lead formal investigations and disciplinary actions**
- Ensure compliance with institutional policies (Title IX, HR)
- Provide guidance and support to involved individuals
- Coordinate with vessel operator on outcomes and actions

Reporting Pathways at Sea

Multiple Ways to Report

Individuals may report concerns through **multiple channels**, including:

Vessel Leadership


- Captain / Master — for immediate safety concerns and required reporting
- Chief Scientist — for issues within the science team
- Marine Superintendent / Operator Representative — for coordination and escalation

Institutional Channels

- Home Institution HR or Title IX Office — direct reporting to your institution at any time
- Responsible Employees (faculty, supervisors) — required to elevate reports per policy

Additional Options

- Anonymous reporting tools or hotlines (when available)
- Trusted supervisors or designated contacts onboard

 Reporting is NOT limited to the chain of command. Individuals may bypass any person and choose the pathway they trust most

| Shipboard Dynamics

Chain of Command

*A research vessel is simultaneously a **workplace**, a **living space**, and an **isolated environment** — traditional chain-of-command reporting can be complicated when the alleged harasser **IS** in the chain of command.*

RESPONDENT IS THE CHIEF SCIENTIST

Reporters should go directly to the Captain, the Marine Superintendent or shore-side vessel operator contact, or home institution HR/Title IV Office.

RESPONDENT IS A CREW MEMBER or SCIENTIST

The Individual may report concerns to responsible authority either onboard the vessel or shore-side. (e.g. Captain, Chief Scientist, Marine Superintendent, HR Office, Title IX Office, Anonymous Hotline or trusted supervisor).

RESPONDENT IS THE CAPTAIN

Reporters should contact the vessel operating institution's Marine Superintendent or shore-side vessel operator HR/Title IX office directly via satellite communication.

RESPONDENT IS THE MARINE SUPERINTENDENT

Reporters should go to the operator's HR/Title IX office or reporting individuals' home institution.



No one should ever be required to report to the person they're reporting about

Multi-Institutional Coordination Challenges

The Challenge

- ⊘ A single cruise may include crew, scientists, and students from multiple institutions
- ⊘ Each institution has its own Title IX office, policies, and investigation procedures
- ⊘ Jurisdictional ambiguity: Unclear which policies apply across institutions
- ⊘ Confidentiality conflicts: Different requirements may limit information sharing
- ⊘ Dual reporting obligations: Required reporting to both USCG and institutional Title IX offices

VS

The Best Practice

- ✔ Pre-cruise alignment: Share reporting contacts and procedures with all participants before departure
- ✔ Single point of coordination: Marine Superintendent (vessel operator) leads multi-institutional response
- ✔ Timely notifications: All relevant institutions and USCG are informed promptly
- ✔ Coordinated response: Institutions work together throughout the process
- ✔ Consistent documentation: Standardized information is shared across all parties

⚠ Same Incident may require reporting through both Federal and institutional channels, which operate independently and in parallel.

Notification & Coordination Steps

Suggested Sequential actions after a report is received — all tracks are activated simultaneously

 **IMMEDIATE**  **WITHIN HOURS**  **WITHIN DAYS**  **ONGOING**

- 1 IMMEDIATE**
Ensure immediate safety of the reporting individual and all parties
- 2 IMMEDIATE**
Master notifies Marine Superintendent / Vessel Operator and documentation begins.
- 3 WITHIN HOURS**
Vessel Operator files USCG report — within hours, not days
- 4 WITHIN HOURS**
Vessel Operator notifies HR/ Title IX Offices of vessel institution and coordinates with home institution(s) of parties involved
- 5 WITHIN DAYS**
Home institutions activate internal processes — Title IX, HR investigation, support services
- 6 WITHIN 10 DAYS**
Vessel Operator provides 10-day follow-up report to USCG describing actions taken
- 7 ONGOING**
All parties coordinate on interim measures and ongoing support
- 8 ONGOING**
Follow up and Resolution. Outcomes are determined, actions implemented

 Both USCG and institutional tracks must be activated independently — completing one does not satisfy the other

Example Scenario 1

Multi-Institutional Harassment Report at Sea

Institution A — Complainant Institution B — Vessel Operator Institution C — Respondent

The Situation Scenario

A graduate student from **Institution A** is participating in a 3-week cruise aboard a vessel operated by **Institution B**. During the second week the student reports to the Chief Scientist that a senior researcher from **Institution C** made repeated unwelcomed sexual comments and cornered them in a lab space.



Action Plan

Recommended Response

1. Chief Scientist ensures the students immediate physical safety and documents the report
2. Chief scientist notifies the Captain
3. Captain/Chief scientist implement interim measures if needed: reassigns lab schedules to separate the parties and adjust berthing if needed
4. The Captain notifies the Marine Superintendent of the vessel operator institution (**Institution B**)
5. As responsible entities the Captain and/or Marine superintendent notifies the USCG
6. Marine Superintendent coordinates with Title IX office of **Institution B** who then leads coordination with the Complainant **Institution A** and Respondent **Institution C**
7. All three institutions coordinate on investigation, with respondent **Institution C** taking the lead.
8. Follow up and disciplinary action is taken by **Institution C**

Example Scenario 2

Chain of Command Conflict

Institution A = Complainant, Vessel Operator, and Respondent

The Situation Scenario

A marine technician reports that the vessel Master made inappropriate physical contact during a late-night watch. **The technician in uncomfortable reporting through the normal chain of command.**



Institution A
Complainant



Institution A
Vessel Op



Institution A
Respondent

Action Plan

Recommended Response

1. Technician contacts the Marine Superintendent directly – by passing the Master
2. Marine Superintendent assesses immediate safety and determines if the vessel should divert
3. If the Master's authority is compromised, the operator may direct the Chief Mate to assume command responsibilities.
4. Marine Superintendent /Vessel Operator **Institution A** files USCG report.
5. Marine Superintendent notifies HR/ Title IX office of **Institution A** for support services.
6. Investigation proceeds through both USCG & **Institution A**
7. Follow up and disciplinary action is taken by **Institution A**



Complainants are never required to report to the subject of their complaint. Alternative channels must be accessible

Key Takeaways



01 — DUAL REPORTING IS MANDATORY

USCG and institutional tracks are independent and both required



02 — REPORT IMMEDIATELY

Via the fastest channel available – delays create legal and safety risks



03 — MASTER ENSURES SHIPBOARD SAFETY

The vessel operator ensures federal compliance; the institutions ensure policy response



04 — POWER DYNAMICS

No one should have to report to the person they are reporting about – use alternative channels



05 — DOCUMENT

Include the date, time, location, involved parties, & a summary of the incident. Be Factual & objective



05 — INTERIM MEASURES

Protect the safety of all and are not disciplinary



05 — COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

UNOLS commitment to providing safe and respectful research environments for all personnel

| Questions & Discussion

Thank You!

