

US ARF Revised Operations Plan to Manage Risks Associated with COVID-19

EXTENDED

30Mar20

On 17 March the UNOLS Office sent out "Guidance Regarding Rescheduling of Cruises Due to Coronavirus Impacts" to the UNOLS community. In that guidance we indicated that operational plans would be revised for at least 30 days essentially tying up the research vessels, with a few exceptions, while we worked to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

While we see that the number of COVID-19 cases are increasing rapidly, we also know that having a rational plan for returning to operations is needed. Different approaches are being taken in different locations in the U.S. as well as across the world to control the spread of the virus and to attend to those who are affected by it. In the U.S. it is clear that the peak of the outbreak and any beginnings of a reduction or flattening of "the curve" are still weeks away, and are based on successful social distancing efforts. Predictions seem to indicate that the trends will vary state to state due to many different risk factors and restrictions. Given the present situation, we are now extending the stand-down recommendation to 1 July 2020.

This is still a fluid situation with a lot more to be learned, therefore it is likely that we may have to adjust that date again as we get through the peak of the pandemic in the coming weeks. But moving the earliest possible return to operations to 1 July, rather than extending 30 days at a time, will hopefully provide more stability for planning.

As we discussed in our Schedulers teleconference this week, there will be many important issues that will have to be taken into account when we start to have clarity and can start the rescheduling process. The work you do now in fully understanding the critical aspects of the funded science projects will help us best prepare for and prioritize that restart of vessel and science scheduling when we are able to restart. Thank you for your efforts on that front.

Safety of the crews and science parties is paramount. Restarting science operations will follow a carefully developed, risk-based assessment of all factors in determining when at-sea work can start again. What works for one ship and/or project will not necessarily work for another - there are many variables that will impact these decisions. The 1 July 2020 restart is not set in stone. It is possible local operations may start earlier if opportunities arise to conduct science in situations where risk is determined to be low. It's just too early to tell with any surety as to when this will be the case. Such decisions by the operating institutions will have to be documented and conducted in concert with UNOLS and the Federal funding agencies. We will not take unnecessary risks as we work to return to oceanographic science operations when the conditions are

right. UNOLS and the Federal agencies are working to develop guidance to help operators and scientists for conducting risk analysis that is a situational approach rather than a blanket recommendation. We expect to share this with all within days.

As we noted in our 17 March notification, we are tracking all the cruises that are impacted by these events. Doing so will help us to make sure we don't miss anything as we work with the science community and ship operators to make sure cruises are rescheduled. The schedulers are reaching out PIs to fully understand and document all the critical factors that will be considered when we start the process of rescheduling all the impacted science cruises.

We greatly appreciate your support and work on the front lines as well as the unwavering support of the Federal agencies.