Field Crop Research - Guidance on the Use of Multiple Person Equipment & Physical Distancing

We understand and support the need for researchers who are going to work in field crop research in support of the agriculture and food sectors (included on the list of ‘essential workplaces’ by the Province of Ontario [1]), to protect themselves from COVID-19.

Currently, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Public Health Ontario advise the following:

- If you are worried that you might have COVID-19 (due to symptoms) or were exposed to COVID-19 (due to a close contact with a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 in the past 14 days), do not come to work, inform your supervisor, and take the Public Health Ontario COVID-19 self-assessment [2] for guidance on next steps OR visit an assessment centre near you [3] to get tested. For a complete list of COVID-19 related symptoms, refer to the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms [4].
- Strict hygiene measures, including frequent hand washing and physical (social) distancing (at least 2-metre separation between yourself and other people) will reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus; and,
- When worn properly, a person wearing a non-medical mask can reduce the spread of his or her own infectious respiratory droplets. Non-medical masks do not provide complete protection against viral particles because of a potential loose fit and the materials used.

Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) in consultation with the Office of Research have determined the following:

1. If your job requires extended periods of time on multiple-person equipment, the Research Station Manager will work with the EHS-Manager of Agricultural & Veterinary Safety and research program leads (Principle Investigators, Lead Technicians) to determine whether modifications to multi-person equipment is possible to achieve the required physical distancing, such as single person use or the addition of barriers.
2. Where it has been determined that barriers for separation or reduction of the user team to achieve physical distancing is not practical, safe or pragmatic, in accordance with the Public Health guideline [5], use of a non-medical mask will be required for you and the other worker near you, as doing so may help protect you both when you are unable to maintain physical distance.
3. The use of a N95 respirator (instead of a non-medical mask) must be limited and should only be considered if the respirator is required to carry out the job safely by reducing exposure to airborne contaminants (other than COVID-19), such as field dust and treated seed. You may wear the N95 respirator if it is warranted by the task in question, as previously determined by EHS.
4. An option may exist to wear a half facepiece elastomeric respirator with particulate filters for those whose tasks require them to use such respiratory protection for the hazards in their work, as previously determined by EHS.

In the current environment, the availability of N95 respirators is limited on a global scale, as well as within the University. We must be very strategic in their use while continuing to ensure the safety of our workers. This will include using disposable PPE more than one time, and ensuring that every mask taken out of inventory, is used for an appropriate reason.

In a ‘normal’ year, the Research Stations would supply PPE for their staff at these locations; and researchers would supply their own, either purchased from external suppliers or from the University of Guelph Stockroom. If your role at the field crop research station has been identified as requiring PPE for non-COVID-19 reasons, it is expected that you will have already sourced the required equipment in anticipation of starting research. If this is not the case or you have identified new users for PPE for non-COVID-19 reasons and acquiring any required PPE is a problem, please advise the EHS-Manager of Agricultural & Veterinary Safety and/or EHS-Occupational Hygienist.

The EHS Manager, Agricultural & Veterinary Safety, M. Christi Cooper may be contacted by email at mcooper@uoguelph.ca [6] by phone at 519-824-4120 ext. 52049.
The EHS Occupational Hygienist, Bryan Lee may be contacted by email at bryanlee@uoguelph.ca or by phone at 519-824-4120 ext. 54855.

Source URL: https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/about-hr/environmental-health-safety-ehs/ehs-programs-policies-guidelines-and-forms/ehs-16

Links
[1] https://www.ontario.ca/page/list-essential-workplaces
[6] mailto:mcooper@uoguelph.ca
[7] http://bryanlee@uoguelph.ca