AECO Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators

AECO Field Code of Conduct

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Introduction

This Field Code of Conduct is intended specifically for AECO field operators in expedition environments, including vessels, expedition leaders, and field staff.

It acknowledges the unique conditions, responsibilities, and professional expectations that arise when working in the field and is designed to support consistent, responsible, and high-standard conduct across all operations.

Emphasis is placed on the importance of maintaining safe, cooperative, and respectful interactions—not only within one's own team but also with other operators in the field.

Field operators are expected to actively avoid situations that may lead to conflict, congestion, or disturbance, including those involving other vessels, landing sites, or shared operational areas. Consideration, clear communication, and adherence to agreed protocols are essential in ensuring smooth and conflict-free operations.

> The document should be understood as a set of guiding principles. It outlines the core values and behaviors expected of AECO field operators, providing a framework to support sound judgment, professionalism, and accountability in diverse and often dynamic field situations.

Field operators are trusted to apply these principles thoughtfully and appropriately, taking into account the context in which they are working. By adhering to this Code of Conduct, field operators contribute to safe, respectful, and environmentally responsible operations that align with AECO's mission and standards.

Article 1: Core Principles

1. Adhere to all applicable international, national, and regional legal frameworks and policy requirements governing operations in the Arctic.

2. Support the mission of AECO to advocate and promote the practice of environmentally friendly, safe, and considerate cruise tourism with respect and consideration for local people, communities, and cultural heritage in the Arctic.

3. AECO member vessels must engage with local communities in a positive and respectful manner, adhere to local rules and regulations, and show respect for and understanding of local customs and practices. Where applicable, operators should explain expected visitor behavior in local communities and follow community guidelines.

4. Treat all visitors to the Arctic with dignity and respect, exercise the highest standards of professional and ethical conduct, and work cooperatively to resolve differences.

5. AECO members will work cooperatively to share experiences and lessons learned.

6. Provide a safe workplace in the field while protecting the fragile and diverse Arctic environment.

7. Augment voyages with strong educational programs that also emphasize the Arctic as being particularly important to enriching and enhancing the standing of Arctic visitation.

Article 2: General Practices & Professional Conduct

1. The AECO Code of Conduct does not supersede existing maritime safety practices or local legislation.

2. All training and certification requirements related to rules and regulations established by Arctic nations must be followed and complied with.

3. The booking procedures and guidelines in the AECO Cruise Database and Live Scheduler must be followed by all AECO vessels.

4. Operators should be aware of other vessels nearby and possible conflicts between vessel activities. When in doubt, radio communication between vessels is essential.

5. Remain aware of nearby vessels and their activities. When sailing past a vessel engaged in operations, communicate your vessel's intentions and ask which activities are in progress.

    I. Avoid disturbances caused by wakes, buzzing, bumping, or crowding other vessels.

    II. This is particularly important when small boats and kayakers are on the water. A ship's wake may not only diminish the kayaking experience but can also create an emergency.

    III. Maintain particular awareness of submersible, scuba-diving, and snorkeling activities. Vessels planning such activities should notify other vessels operating in the same area. Ships and small boats should avoid transiting near deployed submersibles and remain alert for scuba divers and snorkelers in the water.

6. Ships engaged in activities in narrow channels should make sure other vessels have a safe corridor to transit.

7. Coordinate with vessels that are watching wildlife in the area, including when your own vessel is engaged in wildlife viewing.

    i. Call the bridge of the nearby vessel and describe the encounter, including how long you may stay in the area.

        a. Agree on a plan: determine whether the other vessel will join and how the vessels will avoid interfering with one another.

        b. If vessels work cooperatively to watch wildlife, AECO Wildlife Guidelines and national regulations must be followed.

8. Keep the AECO Cruise Database and Live Scheduler updated at all times, respect assigned time slots, and work cooperatively to maintain buffer time between visits to landing sites.

    i. If another vessel arrives early at a site, whether anchoring or not, make sure the bridge officer and/or EL communicate and arrange a plan.

9. Where appropriate, distribute activities among all available experience platforms, such as ship cruising, small-boat cruising, kayaking, and landings, to reduce pressure on the most frequently visited landing sites.

10. Vessels conducting helicopter operations are encouraged to communicate their intentions to nearby vessels for their awareness.

11. Ships and yachts should ensure that they always have functioning AIS equipment and can monitor VHF Channel 16. AECO recommends entering transit information into AIS for each transit.

12. Prevent vessel noise and activities from affecting other vessels, wildlife, and communities, including while in transit. This may require additional planning and spatial awareness.

i. This may require changing or canceling activity plans to avoid disturbing other vessels, wildlife, including marine mammals, or communities.

ii. When in areas with vessels and/or wildlife and/or local presence, careful consideration should be given before using outside public announcement systems.

iii. At any sign of disturbance to wildlife and/or local communities, the activity should cease.

13. Be considerate of local hunters and fishermen. Fishing nets are often difficult to see, so take extra care to avoid disturbing or damaging them.

14. If an AECO member anchors for the day while planning visits to nearby bookable sites, the vessel must be prepared to relocate or adjust its position to accommodate another AECO member with a confirmed booking. Expedition Leaders or bridge officers should communicate intentions clearly and agree on a mutually acceptable solution.

Article 3: Cooperation and Communication

1. Cooperation and communication are essential. Mutual respect, clear communication, and consideration should guide everyone working in the Arctic environment. Effective communication among expedition staff, officers, and other crew members, both internally and between vessels, is essential to safety and environmental protection.

2. Communication with local communities, local community representatives, researchers, educational institutions, authorities, and other industries is essential.

3. Vessels should communicate about ice and weather conditions, unexpected currents, and/or winds. This sharing of information will increase safety.

4. Vessels should promptly communicate high-mortality events or other unusual natural events, such as large mudslides or rockfalls, to the fleet. They should also submit an incident report to the AECO Secretariat and, where applicable, the relevant local government.

5. Respect radio communications: many ships use the same available UHF/VHF channels. If possible, come to an agreement between vessels, changing channels for the conflicted time to avoid miscommunication.

6. When in doubt, call on the radio.

7. When a situation cannot be resolved through normal operational communication, or when it involves a safety, environmental, legal, or serious professional-conduct concern, document and report it to the AECO Secretariat using the AECO Incident Report Form and, where applicable, to the relevant local government.

8. Communication between AECO member vessels and a non-member vessel is best achieved through a friendly dialogue between the EL or navigator on the bridge on the AECO vessel and the skipper of the non-member vessel, beginning on Channel 16 VHF.

Article 4: Conduct Specific to AECO Vessels and Non-member Vessels or Yachts

1. AECO members are not the only visitors to the Arctic. Although AECO members use the AECO Cruise Database and Live Scheduler to avoid conflicts, other operators do not have access to the scheduler. Even when AECO vessels use the scheduler efficiently, extenuating circumstances may result in other vessels being present at an anchorage.

2. In accordance with worldwide practice, if a non-member vessel or yacht is already at an anchorage that conflicts with an AECO vessel's booked site or anchorage, the non-member vessel or yacht is not required to move to accommodate the AECO vessel.

3. If a non-member vessel or yacht moves to accommodate an AECO vessel, the move must be voluntary.

4. When anchoring, sailing yachts often run lines ashore. When navigating small boats near an anchored yacht, care should be taken to avoid anchor lines.