



Sunday, March 15, 2020

*Office of the Director*

Dear friends,

Thank you all for your professional and kind responses to the upheavals taking place at MIT as we fulfill our responsibility to minimize the spread of COVID-19. This message is meant to guide how we will position MKI to remain professionally productive and engaged while we execute a safe scale-back of our on-campus offices and labs.

Please read all of the below carefully. Some items will require a response from individuals and your cooperation is critical so that we do not waste precious time chasing people down.

1. MIT is directing researchers to begin an immediate ramp-down of activities on campus<sup>1</sup> to increase social distancing. Many of us have already done this, but for some groups it is challenging to maintain research continuity without access to experimental hardware. Nevertheless, now is the time to begin implementing the plans discussed last Tuesday, reducing our on-campus presence to the eight critical staff across MKI's three buildings who have already been notified of their status and acknowledged their role.
2. If you are not among these eight, you should be working from home already if your campus presence is not needed to operate equipment. If you are needed to ramp down an experiment, you should plan to complete this work by Wednesday, March 18.
3. The ramp-down must be done in a way that protects the safety of our personnel and our valuable equipment starting now, and extending throughout the period of pause and eventual ramp-up. We do not yet know how long this pause will last. My advice is to configure any hardware to be left untouched for a month or more.
4. Our physical plant and infrastructure must be left in a robust safety configuration with respect to chemicals, vacuum or pressure vessels, fire hazards, water, and electrical or power disruptions. We attach a checklist for all MKI PIs that allows us to take census of these risks, and document each team's plan to mitigate them. MIT wants each of its departments and labs to be fully informed about its risks during shutdown.
5. **All PIs ( = all Faculty, and all Principal and Senior Research Scientists): Your required response to this checklist should be submitted to me by 10:30AM, Monday March 16.** I am required to submit an overall plan for MKI's ramp down to the School of Science by Monday, along with our schedule for implementation. Your participation in this process will keep us on schedule. Multiple faculty and/or research scientists may submit a single form jointly, for configurations involving shared lab space.
6. I will host a Zoom meeting (remote-only) for all MKI PIs at 11AM on Monday 3/16. The agenda for that meeting will be twofold. First, we will run a roll call to make sure that every

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ras.mit.edu/about-research-administration-services/news-and-events/research-continuity-guidance-laboratories-and#AppC>

PI has accounted for all of their graduate students and postdocs (including Fellows for whom they are mentor). Second, we will discuss any questions relating to items (1) - (5) above. **This meeting is mandatory for anyone who has a lab, or supervises students or postdocs.** Please come prepared.

7. We are especially concerned about situations where students need access to experiments to complete a scheduled spring PhD thesis defense, or where MKI is contracted to deliver flight or similar hardware and could miss inextensible deadlines. If you are in this position, please contact me immediately.
8. Magellan operations have transferred to remote observing mode effective tonight. Instructions for observers on how to access remote and/or service observing capabilities are now linked from the Las Campanas Observatory website ([www.lco.cl](http://www.lco.cl)). **We advise all 2020A Magellan observers to visit this page NOW and fill out the extra paperwork** needed to schedule a support astronomer, register for a remote observing VPN/Zoom connection, and learn new requirements for supporting materials, similar to a NASA Phase II proposal.
9. The Magellan partners have agreed to support 100% of the costs of remote/service observing while travel restrictions are in force using an Emergency Fund held in the operations reserve. Therefore, until MIT's travel restrictions are lifted these services are provided at no cost to science PIs. If the virus spreads significantly in Chile, we may need to prepare for a shutdown of Magellan operations similar to what is happening at MIT.
10. As indicated in my last memo, we will continue to hold all-hands Zoom meetings (optional unless indicated otherwise) every Tuesday at 4PM.

As always, we will collect all relevant information at [spacebook.mit.edu](https://spacebook.mit.edu).

It is my fervent hope that we will look back on this six months from now (or look back on warnings about our warming climate 40 years from now) as an over-reaction, which would mean that our measures worked. We must recognize that humans' brains are ill-equipped to assess latent, slow-moving threats of this nature. Fortunately we have the tools to analyze them scientifically. While imperfect, the best evidence available indicates that early, decisive action is the best defense. MIT has judged that it is our responsibility to act accordingly, despite the adverse impacts on our professional activities. I agree strongly with this decision and hope that whether you agree or not, you can respect where it is coming from.

So far, people have reported that things are going well through use of Webex, Zoom, Slack, and other technologies. This would have been unthinkable even five years ago.

Finally, as we absorb the inconvenience of working at home, let's remember others in our communities that do not have this luxury, and may be forced to choose between the health of their families and making their paycheck and rent.

Sincerely,  
Rob