Meet: Dr. Mo Snyder (They/Them)

Presenting: How to go to the bathroom outside, why it is and isn’t a big deal, and what we can all do to make it more accessible

February 6th, 2024, 1:30pm

Bio:
Mo Snyder (they/them) is an assistant professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Science at Acadia University. Mo’s research is focussed in the areas of structural geology, sedimentology, paleontology, and accessibility in the geosciences. Mo spends much of the summer doing field work in Atlantic Canada where there are usually no bathrooms. This means that Mo has experienced plenty of awful field bathroom situations including a lack of privacy, a plethora of insects, and an annoying propensity for UTIs. If Mo accomplishes only one amazing thing in this life, they want it to be making field work exciting and accessible to everyone.

Abstract:
Fieldwork takes place in a wide variety of settings outside the standard classroom or office environment. Whether a day trip in an urban setting or a lengthier excursion in a remote wilderness area, fieldwork typically poses some level of disruption to participants' bathroom habits. Bathroom behaviors directly impact the physical and emotional wellbeing of field workers, with negative outcomes due to disruptions ranging from minor discomforts to serious physical health problems and emotional distress. Bathroom behavior is also a matter of field safety; for example, the desire for privacy can lead to isolation from the group without clear communication, which can increase the risk of unexpected encounters with dangerous wildlife or heavy machinery. Despite these hazards, bathroom matters receive relatively little attention within the typical field health-and-safety framework. Furthermore, bathroom-related concerns or problems distract from workers’ abilities to fully engage in fieldwork and may even discourage participation entirely.

In this talk I will provide a roadmap for creating a bathroom-positive fieldwork culture along with practical tips for improving personal comfort. The most important practice is clear communication. Expectations for professional conduct regarding bathroom behavior should be laid out in advance of any excursion and revisited in the field. Bathroom-related information should be integrated with other key information regarding logistics, gear lists, and health and safety. Consider supplementing first aid kits with bathroom-specific items including toilet paper, disposable urine directors, menstrual hygiene products, ibuprofen, and hand sanitizer, and make sure participants know these items are available. Health and safety training should include information about bathroom-related health hazards such as urinary tract infections, kidney stones, constipation, yeast infections, and Toxic Shock Syndrome. In addition, I will provide an overview of resources describing best practices for going to the bathroom in the field and specialized field gear designed to make taking care of business in the bush more convenient.

This talk is for everyone, whether you are looking to take control of your own field experience, want to improve field bathroom culture for others, or have never given a second thought to going to the bathroom in the field.