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Last updates, July 22, 2020 - semester 2020B news & July 30, 2020 - quarantine news

Due to the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus, the SOAR Telescope suspended all science operations after the night of Monday, March 16. Science operations were suspended for all other NOIRLab and tenant telescopes on Cerro Pachón and Cerro Tololo. At this point no end date for the shutdown can be specified. This news item will be updated as circumstances warrant.

The NOIRLab announcement **and updates** can be found [here](#) [1].

As of March 18, SOAR was safely shut down and all staff were sent home. We appreciate the effort of all involved in getting the telescope to this state quickly. Scientific staff in particular are tele-commuting and can still be contacted with questions. We will post periodic updates on the situation; the NOIRLab site referenced above should also be consulted.

Starting in late March, we have made periodic visits (once per week or less often) with a minimum crew to perform inspections and associated critical maintenance. We had our first snowfall of the winter on June 3, which did not impact the facility.

On July 17, AURA held an audit of all Chilean operations in this operations phase ("Phase 0"), including SOAR. During the audit, future activities were outlined, including a description of what the next phase of operation - including night-time observing - might look like. We have been working on detailed planning for resumption of night-time operations, including staff training and acquisition of additional protective equipment and supplies, as well as coordination with other facilities operating on Cerro Pachón.

Once we determine it is safe to resume operations, it should be possible to resume observing relatively quickly, though the exact timing will depend on the duration of the shutdown and intervening events.

We will notify scheduled observers in advance of resumption of night-time operation. We expect to provide at least 2 weeks notice, based on the estimates of time needed to restore minimum night-time

operations at the summit. Initial observing will likely include all facility instruments, but will be entirely remote (including scientific staff support). **If you are reading this page, and there is no mention of a possible restart date, any such date is 3 weeks out, or potentially much longer.**

2020B Schedule

Although a provisional schedule for the 2020B semester has been developed, and some PIs have been contacted, NOIRLab has decided that it would be best if the **final NOIRLab time allocation is carried out once a definite re-start date is known**; this will make use of the 2020B TAC rankings and consider target availability. (That is, the top-ranked programs will be scheduled, unless those programs' targets are no longer accessible at the time we resume observations.) The process for the other partners with a formal time allocation procedure (Brazil, Chile) may be different; details will be posted here once known. Brazilian and Chilean PIs should feel free to contact their national time allocation offices directly. NOIRLab will notify those PIs who fell below the cut-off for the full semester, as well as those who might get time.

We encourage all our users to keep themselves and their families safe as well; we look forward to working productively together in the future.

Coquimbo Region Quarantine

The Chilean government has established a quarantine - lock-down - for the cities of La Serena and Coquimbo starting Thursday, July 30. Since the observatories are not considered "essential businesses", only a small subset of staff members are authorized to provide critical support or respond to emergencies. With the people authorized for SOAR, plus support from other telescopes, we should be able to respond to an emergency and perform periodic inspections of the facility.

The duration of the lock-down will depend on the evolution of the pandemic locally.

- Jay Elias, Director

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Links

[1] <https://nationalastro.org/news/coronavirus-covid-19-measures-at-oir-lab/>