



## A guide on how to organize a cleanup.

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## **The Planning Basics**

### **Choose a Site or a Reach of Your Stream or River for an On-The-Water Cleanup:**

- Look for an area where there is a lot of litter (sadly, all too easy to find).
- Walk or paddle at least a stretch of the area to see how accessible it is for a group cleanup effort.

### **Choose a Day and Time:**

- Weekends are normally best for cleanups.
- You should pick a date at least a month in advance so you have time to prepare and recruit.
- The length of cleanup is up to you – a few hours, a half-day, or an all-day event with lunch.
- If you choose an all-day event, ask a local restaurant or grocery store to sponsor it by donating lunch and snacks for participants.

### **Get Permission from the Land Manager:**

- Public or private land, you'll need permission for your cleanup. If it isn't clear who owns or manages the land, call your county auditor or land title office.
- It's usually easy to get permission for a cleanup on public land. Ask if the agency wants to help sponsor the event by providing trash bags or disposal.
- With private landowners, focus on the positives of your cleanup. Explain that you want to improve the environment and participants will be respectful of the property.

### **Promote:**

- Advertise your cleanup using flyers, radio, print and social media.
- Contact your local Girl/Boy Scouts, high school Environmental Science teachers, local college Green Campus groups, fishing/boating/paddling groups, and other local environmental groups.
- Tell the Chamber of Commerce and government officials about your cleanup.
- Send a press release to your local media. [Here is a template for you to use.](#)

### **Arrange for Trash and Recycling Removal:**

Start with Your Local Waste Management Company:

- Tell them about your project and explain that it's a volunteer community service effort.
- Ask if they want to sponsor the effort by hauling away the garbage for free or at a discounted price.
- See if they will place a dumpster or roll-off container at or near the site.
- Ask about proper disposal of special/hazardous materials (see below).

If They Say "No," Recruit Volunteers with Pickup Trucks:

- Learn the location of the nearest dump and recycling center.

- Make sure your drivers understand the time commitment to properly dispose of everything.

**Other options that may be available to you:**

- Bridgestone has a program where you can request their help to come and pick up and recycle the tires collected at your event. Visit [THIS PAGE](#) to learn more, including finding the link to [the form](#) you need to fill out to request Bridgestone's assistance for your event.
- [TerraCycle](#) is another service that you can contact about recycling various waste materials that you intend to collect during your event. Visit their website to learn more and to contact them to inquire about their assistance.

**Potential Partners to look in to:**

- [Rivers Alive \(Georgia\)](#)
- [Keep America Beautiful](#)
- [Your local Chamber of Commerce or Development Office](#)
- [Local businesses](#)

**Try to get donated items:**

Glove / bags / etc

- [You can register your event through American Rivers](#), who sometimes provide trash bags.
- You can contact your local hardware store or big chain like Lowes or Home Depot to inquire about them donating gloves and trash bags.
- You can contact your local drugstore to inquire about them donating first aid kits and hand sanitizer
- Sponsor/sponsors for cleanup t-shirts

## The Cleanup

### Before you leave home:

- Check water levels to make sure it's still safe for volunteers!
- Look at the weather for the day. If heavy rain or severe weather is forecasted, you should postpone your cleanup.
- Fully charge your cell phone before leaving home! Volunteers, reporters, VIPs and vendors may need to reach you throughout the day.
- Prepare remarks to kick off the event as well as to conclude the day.
  - [Here's an example from American Rivers](#)

### Set up:

- Arrive at least an hour before the scheduled start time and bring a few friends to help set up.
- Post directional signs for the event so participants can easily locate it.
- Use an app like Water Reporter that gives the location and directions to get to the site
- Check to make sure the area is safe, and there aren't any hazards.
- Look for a safe place for people who will be helping from boats put-in and take-out.
- Set up a check-in station, with media and volunteer sign-in sheet.
  - [Here's a customizable sign-in sheet template](#)
    - *Simply click that link, save the document to your computer and then customize using your own program. Then save as a PDF and print and bring to your cleanup.*
- Make sure you have each participant sign an acknowledgement-of-risk statement / waiver upon check-in. Get name, address, e-mail on the form for follow up – member recruitment, thank you notes etc.
  - [Here's a customizable Release template](#)
    - *Simply click that link, save the document to your computer and then customize using your own program. Then save as a PDF and print and bring to your cleanup.*
- And for precaution, it's worth collecting participants' cell numbers too.
- Establish a base of operations, near your check-in area, with:
  - Water and other refreshments
  - Extra pairs of sturdy work gloves, in various sizes
  - First aid and safety
  - Trash bags and cleanup supplies
  - Life jackets, and perhaps extra paddles, for boaters

- Flyers, fact sheets, “health” status of the river and any other information relevant to your effort and/or your organization
- If you are collecting both trash and recyclables, make sure each volunteer has a bag for each. This will save time at the end of the day.
- If you are using a commercial trash collector, or having catering, please call ahead to confirm they will arrive on time.
- If press is on site for your cleanup, be sure to collect names and contact information and tell them you will follow up with them with results of the cleanup.

### **Kick off your cleanup:**

- Provide brief remarks to get your event off to a good start. (see link above)
- Acknowledge and thank VIPs in attendance and give them a chance to say a few words
- Greet and thank VIPS when they arrive and introduce them to cleanup leaders and volunteers
- Make sure you know when they are scheduled to leave so you can properly send them off
- Talk about the importance of the river and helping the environment
- Emphasize safety!
- Outline what people shouldn't pick up (leaky batteries, chemical containers, sharp items). If folks come across these items, they should notify a cleanup supervisor.
- Go over the schedule for the day
- Identify the cleanup supervisors and provide their cell phone numbers for quick access
- Make sure everyone has a map of the area and knows where to focus

### **Wrap up:**

- When your cleanup is finished, it's time to celebrate! Have a picnic, cookout or lunch for volunteers, or if you're all too tired and dirty, invite people to a celebratory event on another day!
- Say thanks. Follow up with volunteers after the event to say thanks again for making the cleanup a success.
- If you had any civic leaders, VIPs or reporters attend, send a formal thank you note with photos of your event and stats about your cleanup. This is a great gesture that might be helpful in engaging them for future events. This may also be helpful in starting a discussion about political action on river and stream protection!
- Send a press release following the cleanup with photos and quotes from participants and/or leaders. [Sample post-cleanup press release HERE.](#)
- Within one week of your cleanup, send your results to Waterkeeper Alliance by filling out [THIS FORM.](#)

## **HELPFUL TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND**

### **Things to Keep in Mind when Picking a Site:**

- Safety first! Look for areas that are far from busy roads without steep banks, waterfalls, dams, mossy rocks, etc.
- Be sensitive to the ecosystem. Smaller streams might be damaged by heavy foot traffic from a group clean-up. Also, be mindful of any protected areas nearby.
- Make parking easy. Be sure to scout out potential parking areas for participants.
- Find a central meeting place. You'll need an area where you can set up a "base of operations" for check-in, supplies, etc.

### **River Safety Tips:**

- It's OK to make the cleanup fun, but remember SAFETY FIRST!

### **Understand Your Group:**

- Know the limits of your group. Be it age, skill or comfort level with the tasks at hand; don't ask your volunteers to do more than they are able.
- Inform parents and guardians that they are responsible for the supervision of their children. Do your best to see that each child has adult supervision.

### **Proper Dress**

- Insist that volunteers wear work gloves. Even benign trash may be the adopted home of a biting or stinging insect, snake or other creature.
- Dress for the weather and the task. Long sleeves, pants and hats help protect skin from poisonous plants, bug bites and sunburn. Even in hot weather, lightweight long sleeve shirts and pants are strongly recommended.
- Encourage participants to wear hats and work boots (preferably waterproof), or waders; sneakers and sandals are discouraged.

### **Check the Weather, Know your River's Level and What the Level Means:**

- If heavy rain is forecasted, you should postpone. Rivers – and especially smaller streams – can rise rapidly during heavy rain.

- If water levels are above average, do not attempt your cleanup, postpone it until water levels are safe.

#### **Set the End Time Well Before Dark:**

- Allow extra time to wrap up the event so it concludes before nightfall.

#### **Identify and be Aware of the Risks in the Outdoors:**

- Snakes, insects, poison ivy, poison oak, other wildlife, etc.
- Extreme weather (heat, cold, sun, wind).
- Know where the closest medical facilities are and have phone numbers for facilities and ambulance service(s).

#### **Use Common Sense**

- If it sounds, looks or smells dangerous, it could be. Don't touch it and notify a cleanup supervisor. Remember, no one should pick up anything they don't want to.
- Sharp items like needles or glass can be placed in an empty detergent bottle and thrown away with the regular trash.

## **SAFETY TOOLS FOR YOUR CLEANUP**

### **First Aid Kit:**

- You should always have a standard first aid kit on hand for any cleanup events. For larger cleanups, consider bringing several kits as your group might spread out. Check if anyone in your group has first aid/CPR training or is a medical professional.

### **Protective Gear:**

Protect your group from hazards by encouraging everyone to use:

- Work gloves
- Work boots with hard soles
- Personal Flotation Device (life-vest), if on a boat
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Hand sanitizer
- Everyone should bring a bottle of water and some snacks to maintain their energy
- Remind any with allergies to bring their meds

### **On or near the Water:**

If people in your party are boating, follow these ground rules to help the trip go smoothly and safely:

- ALWAYS WEAR YOUR Life Jacket
- Appoint a “Lead” Boat (Front) and “Sweep” Boat (Rear)
- Ask people to stay behind the lead and in front of the sweep. The lead and sweep should be more experienced boaters, and should both be equipped with first-aid kits.
- No diving or jumping into the water, no deliberate boat tipping, etc.
- Stay within sight of each other: If you can’t see the last boat in the group stop until you can.
- Appoint someone to make decisions in case of an emergency, as decisions by consensus don’t always work in emergency situations.
- Identify and Avoid Hazards: Look out for strainers (trees and debris buildups in the water). Also watch for drops, dams and other more difficult river features. Rivers are dynamic! Features may have changed since you first scouted the river when planning the cleanup.
- Have an Emergency Plan: Prepare a tip sheet with emergency phone numbers and evacuation routes.
- Steer away from fishermen, swimmers and other boaters.
- Make sure volunteers are aware of hazards to navigation such as low-head dams, sills, spillways or weirs.

**Handling Trash:**

Garbage can be dirty, rusty, slimy, and/or sharp. Be careful when handling trash to avoid cuts and abrasions. Emphasize to everyone: Don't be afraid to ask for help; don't try to lift heavy objects alone. Larger pieces of trash can have reptiles under them or in them (tires) and fire ants can be in and around food and drink wastes.

**Avoid Hazardous Materials:**

- If you or another cleanup supervisor has been alerted to any hazardous materials, contact the state's Department of Environmental Management, Pollution Control or like agency IMMEDIATELY.
- Drums or containers may contain toxic waste.
- Needles and other biohazard waste are dangerous.
- Handle these items with caution: broken glass, aerosol cans, gas cans and other containers with chemical residues or traces of volatile materials.
- Never handle found live ammunition or explosives – immediately alert the authorities if these items are discovered during your cleanup.
- Wear all safety gear if handling hazardous materials such as glass and metal containers.