

World Oceans Day



Aquatic Cleanup Guide



Why Organize a Cleanup?

Cleanups help establish stronger connections in your community and nearby natural water sources. Whether you're with a zoo, aquarium, museum, school, recreational organization, business, or other organization, you can build important connections with your visitors and members, students, and the public, and clean up your community or coastline. By spending part of a day picking up litter, your participants are able to observe, firsthand, the impact of their cleanup efforts. Ultimately, participants will be encouraged and empowered by cleanups and are more likely to participate in future water quality and community improvement activities. Additionally, by organizing a cleanup, your organization will be seen as a conservation leader in your community.

How to Get Started

Dedicate a Cleanup Coordinator

It helps to have one dedicated Cleanup Coordinator. Your organization should also form a Cleanup Committee to meet regularly before the project date to share ideas, troubleshoot potential problems and set group and individual responsibilities.

Select your Site

Where will the cleanup group focus its efforts? There are many options: a stream, a lake, a pond, a river, a bay, a coastal wetland, the ocean, or any other body of water, particularly where litter has accumulated. You can even do an "underwater" clean-up, utilizing people who are SCUBA-certified.

Cleanup projects can be in public areas, such as local or state parks (including aquatic or marine parks), or other community property.

Coordinate with Others

Explore what other events are occurring. Collaborate as much as possible. Be sensitive to any other stakeholders who may have a pre-existing interest in your area (be "turf" conscious) and make it a win-win for all involved.

Site Considerations

- Is the site meaningful to you and your community? What was the site used for in the past?
- Is the site safe?
- Is the site accessible to volunteers? (Consider ease of getting to, entry and exit)
- Will tides be an issue?
- What types of trash or debris are present?
- Are there any sensitive areas that should be treated with care?
- Are hazardous substances present that make the site unsuitable for a cleanup? (If there are questions or concerns, contact your local government agency.)

Pick a Date

Establish the cleanup date, ideally at least 8 weeks before the event. Determine if your community would benefit (or not) from setting a rain date (there is potential with a rain date to lose considerable volunteer commitment). If equipment will be borrowed, make sure it is available on the set date.

Obtain Permission

Whether public or private, you must receive written permission to be on the land or in the water prior to the cleanup date.

Scout your Site

Walk your selected site prior to the project date to gain a better idea of the amount and type of litter to which the volunteers will be exposed. If coastal, check the tide charts. Revisit the site approximately two weeks before the project date to create a series of maps to help cleanup crews locate accumulations of litter. Survey information might include sizes, types, abundance of objects, and if objects can be hauled out on foot or whether a vehicle is necessary.

Select Central Meeting Place

Reserve a facility or location where volunteers will meet the day of the project. This central location will not only serve as the initial meeting place, but also as the location where trash bags are brought for recycling or to transfer to dump or trash trucks.

Arrange for Disposal

Also, contact local officials (government department for public works or recycling coordinator) to determine what services are available to you, including:

- Removal of trash bags and other types of recyclables
- Removal of large items (e.g. cars, appliances, tires)
- Removal of hazardous waste (e.g., paint cans, batteries)
- Transportation for disposing of trash and recyclables
- Waiving of any dumping fees

If not using Terracycle, or local officials cannot help, locate the closest recycling center to confirm days and hours of operation, acceptable items, limits on quantity of materials delivered, and specifications for advance preparation. (*Call again to confirm a few days before the cleanup.*) If the center is not open on the cleanup day, secure a safe location where recyclables can be stored until the center reopens. You will also need to contact the nearest landfill to confirm the days and hours of operation for non-recyclable items. Local, private companies may be able to assist you in this process.

Tips for Setting a Date for Your Cleanup

- Weekend mornings are the best times to schedule a cleanup
- Avoid holiday weekends
- Cleanups typically last about 4 hours- plan for extra time before and after the cleanup, especially if end of the day festivities are planned.

Publicize your Event!

- Distribute flyers
- Draft and distribute press releases
- Encourage media to attend
- Invite a local politician or celebrity to speak at event
- Use the event to complement your volunteer recruitment efforts

Coordinate cleanup event with other local or national and international events (ideally, on or around World Oceans Day).

Recruit Volunteers

Anyone can assist in a cleanup project; zoo, aquarium, and museum visitors and members, employees of local businesses, watershed and other community associations, school groups, religious or spiritual-oriented groups, and universities and youth groups are examples of potential volunteer sources. Youth, if under the age of 18, must have permission from a parent or guardian and adequate supervision (one adult supervisor for every six children recommended) should be arranged. Also, be sensitive about mixed age events: Schools tend to prefer school-only events, not putting their kids in a mix with unknown adults or older youth. You may want to offer transportation (buses, vans, etc.) from your organization. Finally, be forewarned, 50% of those who sign up for the event will not actually participate so recruit a lot of people!

Create Work Teams and Site Captain

Nobody should work alone. All group members, whether students or adults, should always work in teams of two or more. Site captains should be assigned to coordinate teams on the day of the cleanup.

Gather Equipment and Materials

Provide site captains and cleanup crews with the following:

- Large trash bags and boxes for recyclables
- “Sharps” containers in case needles are located
- Work gloves and/or disposable plastic gloves
- Rakes, shovels, and/or litter poles
- Flagging tape
- Data sheets (to record all litter and debris found by type and number), which can be provided to coordinating body for analysis and highlighted for any press outreach
- Maps - each team will need two maps:
 - A map of their assigned section
 - A roadmap of the route between their section and the central meeting place
- Water (in reusable bottle!) and snacks (or encourage people to bring them)
- Sun screen and first aid kits



The Big Day

A sign-in sheet should be provided for volunteers at the central meeting place on the day of the cleanup. Project supervisors can then introduce the site captains, brief the volunteers on how to separate recyclable litter from non-recyclable litter, assign cleanup sections with starting points to deposit trash for pick up, list project supervisors in case of emergency, mention any particular hazards, and help site captains form cleanup teams. Hazards are of particular note during training – all volunteers should wear gloves at all times, and volunteers should be cautioned about picking up glass and other hazardous materials.



End of the Day Festivities and Awards

Coming together at the end of the day is important. Cleanup volunteers can reconvene at the central meeting site by the assigned time for refreshments and rewards to help celebrate their accomplishments and get reinvigorated for the next cleanup! If funds are available, it's always nice to give people a memento of their time – whether that is an inexpensive button, a photo, reusable bag or a t-shirt ([Shop World Oceans Day merchandise](#)).

References and for More Detailed Information:

- Marine Conservation Society's [Great British Beach Clean](#)
- Vancouver Aquarium and WWF-Canada's [Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup](#)
- Ocean Recovery Alliance's [Oceanic Big Five Cleanups](#)
- [Take 3](#)
- Ocean Conservancy's [Do-It-Yourself Cleanup Toolkit](#) and the International Coastal Cleanup
- Let us know your favorite sites and resources and we'll update this guide on a regular basis! (Contact: info@worldoceansday.org)
- Register your event on the [World Oceans Day website](#) to share and inspire