

# Community Cleanup Guide

## Action Guide for Celebration Organizers

**Organize a Community/Coastal Cleanup at your nearby stream, river, lake, beach, reef, or other freshwater or coastal habitat**

### 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, nature center, or other type of conservation-oriented or citizen (sea) grassroots organization, you can build important connections with your visitors and members, and the public. 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. Plus, *they're fun!*

### 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, state, or national parks (including aquatic or marine parks), or other community property. Projects can also be on private property.

### 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)

Are hazardous substances present that make the site unsuitable for a cleanup? (If there are questions or concerns, contact your state Dept. of Health or Environmental Management.)

Will tides be an issue?

What type of transportation will be available to cleanup site?

What types of trash or debris are present?

Are there any sensitive areas that should be treated with care?

## 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.

## Make a Date

Establish the cleanup date at least 8-10 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.

## Scouting your Site

Walk your selected site 8-10 weeks 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.

## 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 transfer to dump or trash trucks.

## Arrange for Disposal

Contact local officials (the local Department of Public Works or Recycling Coordinator) to determine what services are available to you, including:

- Removal of trash bags and 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
- First aid/medical

If 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

### TIPS FOR SETTING A DATE FOR YOUR CLEANUP

Weekend mornings are the best times to schedule a cleanup.

Avoid holiday weekends or weekends when the Daylight Savings Time switch is made.

Cleanups typically last about 4 hours – plan for time before and after or organizing and cleanup, especially if end of the day festivities are planned.

location where recyclables can be stored until 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.

## Recruit Volunteers – 6 Weeks Prior to Cleanup

Anyone can assist in a cleanup project; zoo, aquarium, and museum visitors and members, employees of nearby businesses, watershed and other community associations, school groups, church and other religious or spiritual-oriented groups, and scout troops are examples of potential volunteer sources. Children, 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 can be touchy about this and 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 zoo, aquarium, museum, or organization. Finally, be forewarned, 50% of those who sign up for the event will not actually participate so recruit a lot of people!

**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.

## 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: 1) a map of their assigned section; and 2) a roadmap of the route between their section and the central meeting place
- Water 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 disposable plastic gloves at all times, and volunteers should be cautioned about picking up glass and other hazardous materials.

### Publicize your Event!

Distribute fliers.

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 events (we recommend on or around World Ocean Day in the beginning of June or Coast Weeks in September).

As teams collect trash, they should leave all filled bags at their starting point. About 1-2 hours later, volunteers with vehicles should begin collecting bags from these points to bring back to the central meeting place. All volunteers should return to the central meeting place at the assigned time and should call if late to ensure that all teams are accounted for.

### 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, or a t-shirt (contact [The Ocean Project](#) for other ideas).

### References and for More Detailed Information:

- [Adopt a Stream - Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation](#)
- [International Coastal Cleanup - The Ocean Conservancy](#) has been working with thousands of volunteers to remove debris from the world's oceans and waterways for two decades.
- ["Lessons from the Bay" – Virginia Department of Education](#)

### Some areas you may want to further investigate:

- Coordinating the actual cleanup day activities and how to manage the teams
- Volunteer safety rules
- More details on publicizing the event
- More specific training for site captains
- Information on transporters and drivers
- Ensuring adequate follow-up to stimulate further interest and involvement.

Contact The Ocean Project for further information: [info@WorldOceansDay.org](mailto:info@WorldOceansDay.org)  
401.709.4071 [www.WorldOceansDay.org](http://www.WorldOceansDay.org) \* [www.TheOceanProject.org](http://www.TheOceanProject.org)

