

Planning and Conducting a Litter Cleanup

► Litter cleanups remove harmful trash that may pose a health or environmental hazard, improve local aesthetics, and help engage communities in educational, hands-on programs.

What is a litter cleanup?

Litter cleanups are a great way to involve your community in improving the local and global environment. Litter is commonplace across the United States and contributes to the decline of aquatic ecosystems and the harm to public health. Trash not correctly disposed of washes into storm drains and local waterways, often leaving behind microplastics and other toxins. Every year, more than 9 billion tons of litter enter the oceans, harming aquatic life. Litter can also carry bacteria, viruses, and parasites that impact human health. By conducting a litter campaign, you help fight the war against pollution, reduce the problem at the source, and increase awareness in your community.

Step 1: Set goals and volunteer numbers.

Goals help determine the number of volunteers, funding, and planning needed to conduct a campaign. Goals may include raising awareness of the environmental impacts of littering, changing long-term habits and beliefs, or cleaning a site that is unpleasant in your community. Seek input from partners and community members. Tailoring the event to your community will increase the likelihood of its success.

Determine if a large or small clean-up event best fits your goals.

Small events involve fewer than 15 volunteers.

- Volunteers may have a clear sense of reward by cleaning a focused area.
- Small events are simpler to plan and require fewer resources.
- Pay attention to site selection; smaller events may have too much litter to clean in the allotted time.



Large events involve more than 15 volunteers.

- They reach more volunteers.
- More problem areas may be cleaned.
- Coordinating a large group requires more planning and logistics. Creating multiple groups and team leaders can help.
- Transporting and correctly sorting litter is also an issue.

Step 2: Pick a site.

Work with stakeholders to address a problem in your community and accomplish set goals. Potential sites include unsightly abandoned property, roadsides, and public areas such as parks, beaches, boat ramps, and picnic areas.

- Consider site accessibility – the safety of your volunteers is of utmost importance. Volunteers and emergency personnel should be able to reach your site with ease.
- Coordinate with other cleanup campaigns in your community to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Get permission to conduct a cleanup from a local government, property owner, or site manager, depending on the property. You may also contact your local law enforcement office and make them aware of the event.

If you are unaware of a problem area in your community, contact your local public works department or environmental groups. They can help you find a site and will often advise from previous campaigns.

Step 3: Plan for success.

Identify and recruit volunteers. Outdoor groups (biking, hiking, birding), service organizations and clubs, friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers are options. Create a clever campaign name to grab attention. Depending on your target number of participants, use social media and local news outlets accordingly to invite participants.

Identify resources. Do you need funding or donations? Check with local governments (e.g., Keep America Beautiful affiliates), businesses, and organizations. Compile a list of what you need, quantities, and estimated cost (see checklist).

Plan for litter disposal. Contact local public works departments and Keep America Beautiful affiliates for advice. Consider recycling appropriate items if that is available in your area.

Measure your success. Will you weigh the litter collected? Will you count the number of bags of trash removed? Will you catalog types of litter collected to inform future efforts and education? Will you survey volunteers for changes in knowledge or attitudes? Plan to document your impact. Again, check with local Keep America Beautiful affiliates for ideas on their method of documentation.

Reward the volunteers. Have a cookout or pizza party, hand out prizes or certificates for most trash collected or craziest item found. Celebrate on social media and submit reports to local news outlets. Take before and after pictures.

Step 4: Develop partnerships

Use the checklist to approach local businesses and organizations for partnerships. Show appreciation through social media and event day acknowledgments. Here are some tips for recruiting potential partners.

Describe

- who you are
- the litter campaign goals
- what you're requesting and any associated cost (volunteers, supplies, endorsements, donations, etc.)
- why you're asking
- how best to showcase public appreciation (event sponsor, listed on flyers, social media, signs, etc.)

Keep an open mind when asking for donations. You may not receive what you want, but you never know where a contact and a positive relationship will take you.

Consider drafting a document that outlines the what, when, and where of partnerships to avoid miscommunication.

Step 5: Pick up litter!

Communicate the time, date, place (and rain date) to volunteers, partners, and social media posts. Arrive early with supplies, mark litter stations, first aid stations, and set up photo points to share the event. When finished, communicate successes, lessons learned, and future opportunities to build on the momentum created. Stay engaged and assemble an email list to notify volunteers of future efforts.

Pre-event checklist (3 to 4 weeks prior):

- Form a group—partners, volunteers, friends, or coworkers—to help you conduct your event. Have an organized group with clear roles before the day of the event.
- Obtain permits or permission to access the site(s) if needed.
- Communicate with the site owner or manager before the event.
- Conduct a walk-through of site(s).
- Inform local law enforcement.
- Obtain supplies needed for your campaign.

- Submit a press release in your local newspaper 2 weeks before the event.
- Ramp up your social media presence the week of the event to recruit volunteers and raise public awareness.
- Request volunteers to RSVP before the event to have enough supplies. Tip: Make a Facebook event and have volunteers RSVP there.
- Arrange for trash disposal.
- Select a central meeting point at the event for volunteers to register and sign a liability form (example forms are available online). Gain any permissions needed.
- Plan for restrooms for your volunteers.
- Plan for refreshments.
- Communicate with your volunteers when and where to show up, what type of clothing they should wear, and the conditions expected at the site.
- Assemble a first aid kit.
- Review event details with volunteers before the event starts.
 - Thank everyone for being there.
 - Give everyone the plan.
 - Share project goals.
 - Describe the site (history, boundaries, neighborhood requests, etc.)
 - Mention restroom locations.
 - Go over general safety rules.
 - Point out the location to drop off collected trash.
 - Share who to contact in case of emergency.
 - Show where first aid is.
 - Point out where refreshments are.
 - Mention when the event ends.
 - Don't forget any other valuable information for your event.

Day of the event checklist:

- Arrive early to set up the event and registration location. Bring liability forms for all participants to sign.
- If applicable, confirm the waste hauler has placed receptacles and is readily available on the day of the campaign.
- Have your permission or permits ready if needed, such as a text message on your phone or an email you have saved.
- Make sure all trash and recyclables are disposed of correctly.
- Take photos and encourage volunteers to share their experiences on social media. Their messages can help with recruiting new volunteers for your next successful event.



John Lawhon, Intern; **Eve Brantley**, Director, Water Resource Center; **Laura Bell**, Extension Watershed Program Coordinator; **Naomi Pitts**, Watershed Student Assistant; **Bethanie Hartzog**, Watershed Student Assistant, Auburn University

For more information, contact your county Extension office. Visit www.aces.edu/directory.

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