

How to organize and conduct a waterway cleanup

Rivers, lakes and streams



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Introduction

Waterway cleanups are not new. Many of you have probably participated in a cleanup before. This guide is to assist in planning and conducting cleanups on a local waterway.

Communication of the purpose and goal of the cleanup is important in recruiting and motivating volunteers. Emphasize that numerous cleanups may be necessary but the goal is to rid the area of unsightly trash.

If you belong to a group or you wish to recruit volunteers not associated with your group, the procedures are the same. The following sections provide a template for you to have a successful cleanup. All cleanups will help remove trash, but some are more efficient. We hope this guide will help make your cleanup a success!

Clothing and supplies

Wear appropriate clothing to cleanup events. Dress according to time of the year and weather. Recognize you may get dirty so keep this in mind when picking out your attire. Wear the appropriate footwear for the areas you will be walking or wading. If you will be in brushy areas, you may want to wear long sleeves and long pants to protect your arms and legs from briars, abrasions and poison oak and ivy.

Utilize insect repellent and sun screen when necessary.

When working during hot weather, drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. Take breaks if you feel overheated.

Utilize gloves to protect your hands

from cuts, abrasions and harmful materials.

Utilize nets, trash-grabbers, garden tools, rakes and other long-handled tools to help reach items.

Make sure to utilize large trash bags that can hold the debris you will be picking up. Contractor-grade trash bags are preferred.

Recon

The first step is to determine the need by conducting a survey of the waterway. If you find a significant quantity of trash, determine what constitutes the makeup of the trash. Is it large items such as tires, furniture, refrigerators and freezers, or is it small hand-trash such as bottles, paper and cans? If there has not been a cleanup in the past or the waterway is near an unauthorized dumping site, you may have both types of trash. During the recon, mark the locations with large quantities of trash on a map and determine the extent of the trash in regard to the distance of the trash from an access point on the waterway. Generally speaking, you will have to limit your efforts to specific sites, realizing you cannot clean the entire waterway. Never overextend!

Resources

Once the trash makeup and extent of dispersal are determined, you can decide what type resources are needed in regard to equipment and manpower.

If you have a significant quantity of larger items, you will need larger boats in navigable waterways and more

manpower than in areas of the smaller hand-trash. Hoists and lifts may be necessary to move the larger items. Always make sure you have adequate manpower and the right equipment before you send volunteers out to a cleanup site. Sending too many volunteers to a site with little trash is just as bad as sending too few volunteers to a site with significantly large quantities of trash. Both are a misuse of resources and can cause volunteers to stop participating. Providing maps and locations for volunteers to target is a must.

Safety

Emphasize caution and safety procedures while conducting a cleanup. Utilize proper lifting techniques. Wear proper protective gear during the cleanup. Watch for broken glass, nails in boards, stinging and biting insects, snakes and other creatures that inhabit our waterways. Do not empty sealed containers into the waterway. They can be properly disposed in the landfill. Remember, you will be in uneven terrain and water, so move carefully.

Duration of cleanup

Cleanups should generally be in the morning hours, if possible. This is especially true during warmer months. If the cleanup begins at 8 a.m., it should end at noon. A picnic lunch following the event is always well-received. This helps make the cleanup a social event, and it may become an annual event. In some cases, volunteers may wish to work all day. This may depend on what

items are being picked up. However, do not burn out your volunteers! Remember, they are volunteers and donate their own time and money to help this cause.

Disposal of trash

Proper disposal of the trash is one of the most important factors in having a successful cleanup. Pre-arrange the method of disposal. Contact a waste management company and local landfill prior to the cleanup and have this duty handled long before the event.

Recycling

If you desire to recycle, let the volunteers know before the cleanup so they can separate as they pick up the trash. Separation during initial pickup is more efficient if you are depending on non-machine separation of the trash.

Record keeping

Record the number of volunteers and poundage collected. This information allows you to keep a record of the cleanups for comparison, publicity and other factors.

A signup sheet with contact information is a good way to communicate future cleanups to your volunteers.

KISS

Keep It Safe and Simple and you can make a difference in your community!

**For further information, contact:
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