

How To: Host Your Own Cleanup

Every year during Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup®, hundreds of thousands of volunteers comb lakes, rivers and beaches around the world for trash. Over the course of nearly three decades, more than 10 million volunteers have collected nearly 165 million pounds of trash.

No matter where you live—whether on the coast or thousands of miles away—all waterways lead to the ocean. But if we take action and work together, we can improve the ocean's health and make trash free seas a reality. It is important to remember cleanups come in all forms. Cleanups taking place at a local park or even a school playground are just as impactful and fun as beach or river cleanups. Here's everything you'll need to plan your own Cleanup event.

Before the Cleanup

First, you'll need to pick a Cleanup location. Above all, the location should be safe. If the location you wish to clean is a park, marina, private property, etc., make sure to contact the site and ask for permission to have a cleanup there on your desired date and ensure you don't need any permits. Ask the park or other site contact where the collected trash should be disposed. Most sites will offer to collect the trash and dispose of it for you. Other sites may have a dumpster on site where trash can be left, but in some cases, it may be necessary to contact a waste management organization to help dispose of the trash properly.

Once you have permission, permits (if applicable) and a waste disposal plan, it is important to prepare for the cleanup day. Follow these steps to be completely prepared for the cleanup:

1. Visit the cleanup site in advance to determine:
 - a. Where to set up a “home base” or meeting point
 - b. Where to leave bags of trash and recyclables
 - c. What areas participants will clean
2. Contact your crew:
 - a. Encourage colleagues, family and friends to get involved and help you organize your cleanup. Meet up to plan the event and assign roles.
 - b. Spread the word by telling everyone about the cleanup through email, social media and e-vites.
3. Get your supplies. For a successful cleanup, you will need:
 - a. Trash bags (or have participants bring reusable containers, like buckets)
 - b. Gloves (gardening gloves or disposable latex-free gloves) for participants (or have them bring their own gloves)
 - c. Container for sharp or hazardous items.
 - d. [Cleanup data forms to record the items picked up](#)
 - e. Pens or pencils
 - f. A first-aid kit for minor cuts and scrapes
 - g. A water cooler with enough water to keep all participants hydrated, especially in warm temperatures
 - h. Optional: If you have a few clipboards, these are helpful for holding data forms.



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- i. Optional: If you have a fish or a luggage scale (a scale with a hook) at home, you can use it to weigh the trash you collect.
4. For the safety of you and your participants, keep the following in mind:
 - a. Review what to do in case of a health emergency (heat exhaustion or heatstroke, broken bone, etc.). It might be helpful to have another leader on hand that has basic medical training or knows first aid.
 - b. When visiting the site, look for natural and man-made safety hazards, such as rocky areas, highly variable tides, poisonous plants, high-speed roads, power lines, etc. If necessary, inform participants that they may need to dress accordingly, such as wearing long pants or closed-toed shoes.
 - c. Plan ahead for handling sharp items, including syringes or pieces of broken glass. We recommend disposing of these items in a container with a tight screw lid, such as an empty liquid laundry detergent bottle that you have clearly labeled. Ask younger participants to point these objects out to an adult so they can be disposed of properly.
 - d. Find out how to contact the local Fish and Wildlife Service office in case you encounter any dead, entangled or injured wildlife. You can report these finds on your data form, but be sure to leave any wildlife handling to the experts.

The following best practices are generally used for NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) activities to ensure compliance with applicable laws for environmental protection and to minimize or avoid potential impacts on environmental resources. Some practices are species, location, and seasonal dependent and may have been developed in consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

- **General Conservation:** All activities avoid or conserve the habitat of any endangered or threatened species. This may include using buffer areas around sensitive resources (e.g., rare plants or archeological sites would be pre-identified and avoided). Other examples include not coming within three nautical miles of a Steller sea lion critical habitat without applicable federal permits; observing a buffer of at least 100 yards from an endangered species rookery; avoiding salmon spawning areas during spawning season; and avoiding piping plover nesting areas during nesting season.
- **Project Timing:** Timing of activities would be limited to periods when important species are least likely to be in the project area (e.g., pre-determined windows of time when anadromous fish are not expected to be utilizing the project area) to minimize any potential impacts to living marine resources. Actions are limited to times when vulnerable life history stages of protected species are not present to avoid potential adverse impacts on that life stage and overall to minimize adverse impacts to that species. The MDP would consult with the NMFS Office of Protected Resources (OPR) before working in areas that are known to be utilized by endangered fish or other animals.
- **Sea Turtles:** Sea turtles are susceptible to artificial lighting that is visible from the beach, barriers on the beach, and disturbance of the nest site by humans and predators. Avoid using light when possible; otherwise shield the light so it does not reach the beach. Minimize physical disturbance of beach material to reduce the likelihood of adverse impact to a sea turtle nest. Use animal-proof waste containers to minimize attraction of non-native predators to beach areas.



During the Cleanup

To ensure a smooth and successful cleanup experience, be as prepared as possible before participants arrive. Designate your check-in station/meeting point and trash drop-off location.

Once on site, be sure to address the following before starting the clean-up:

1. Emphasize the importance of safety. It is safest and more fun to work in small groups.
2. Point out any safety hazards and recommend how to avoid these hazards. Remind participants what to do when they encounter items such as sharp objects or dead, entangled or injured animals. Younger participants should not touch any sharp items; have participants point these items out to an adult who will safely dispose of the item.
3. Remind participants they are scientists for the day. For example: ***“Today we are all citizen scientists. As scientists, we must collect data while cleaning up. The data we collect will not only tell us more about what items we are finding locally, but will also be added together with data from around the world to create a global picture of the marine debris problem. These data will help us think about local solutions to marine debris.”***
4. Ask participants to use tick marks to record debris items; words such as "lots" and "many" are not useful for data analysis.
5. To make data collection easier, participants should work in small teams with each team focused on one data card.
6. If you have other leaders' assistance, establish a point-person to stay at the meeting place so there is always one person to handle questions, late arrivals, emergencies, etc.
7. Inform participants what to do with the filled bags of trash, and set an end time for the cleanup so that everyone returns together.
8. Take before and after photos of the cleanup site as well as photos of your participants in action and a final group picture with all of the trash collected. One of the best parts of a cleanup is documenting the participants' impact.
9. (Optional) If you have a scale with a hook, use it to weigh the trash collected. This can be done at the end as a group or as participants return with full trash bags. If you don't have a scale, you can use a standard conversion of 15 pounds per trash bag to estimate the overall weight of your collected trash.
10. As the participants finish, collect all completed data forms. Make sure participants note how many people worked on each card.
11. All Post Cleanup activities can take place at the cleanup site, once all participants have returned to the meeting spot. If short on time, conduct a short group discussion with participants about their initial reactions to the cleanup and the items they collected. Discussion prompts are provided in next section.
12. When the group is ready to leave, ensure all trash is either left at a designated drop-off location or taken with you to dispose of properly. No materials should be left behind.

After the Cleanup

When your cleanup is over, be sure to collect all of the data forms so that the information can be returned to Ocean Conservancy.

Please send data, pictures, stories, and reactions to the Cleanup the following address:

- Email: cleanup@oceanconservancy.org
- Mail: Ocean Conservancy
Attn: International Coastal Cleanup
1300 19th St NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

One great way to conclude your Cleanup event is with a short discussion of everyone's experience. This type of discussion not only allows people to reflect on the amazing work they just completed, but also connects participants with the issue and its prevention.

Start a discussion by asking the group of participants:

- ***How did this experience make you feel?***
 - *Did you feel frustrated? Surprised? Motivated?*

Continue the discussion by asking participants about particular items:

- ***Were you surprised by some of the items found?***
 - *Which items surprised you the most? Why?*
- ***Were you surprised by the quantity of certain items?*** If you have time to total participants' data forms before the discussion, ask: ***Were you surprised by the top 5 items collected?***

Now try to shift the conversation to a prevention focused conversation by asking:

- ***Were many of the items you collected recognizable?***
- ***Do you use many of these items at home, at the office or on the go?***
- ***Are there any ways we can begin to reduce these items from ending up in our ocean and waterways?***

Finally, make sure to say "Thanks!" Send out an email saying, "Look what we did!" Include how many colleagues, friends, family and community members joined in, and how many pounds of trash were collected. Share photos from the event with your community, and consider uploading photos to Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup Flickr account.

