

Conducting a Waterbody Clean-Up

This guideline provides information on how to conduct a waste clean-up as part of a Community Action for Fresh Water project. Waste clean-ups, (which can be defined as removing plastic bags, litter, trash, etc.) can be an excellent starting point for CAFW projects. This guideline will provide information on several important aspects that should be considered when planning a clean-up.

It is recommended that clubs develop a comprehensive project plan, unique to their project, that is both proactive (e.g., anticipates volunteer needs, safety, and risk mitigation) and reactive (e.g., responds to unplanned issues). The project plan should be documented and communicated to all volunteers.

It is important to ensure the project abides by all local and national laws and protects the club and itself from liability claims for injury or damage. This guideline does not provide all the information on these issues, and it is recommended that clubs complete their own due diligence on this issue.

Why conduct a clean-up?

A waste clean-up is an excellent way to improve the local environment around your waterbody and has an immediate visual impact. Clean-ups can be a relatively low-cost and simple activity to organize and engage community members, potential donors, and external partners. Setting up a clean-up offers the opportunity to assess the accessibility, ownership, and health status of a freshwater body where more intensive restoration efforts may be planned later.

Below are recommended steps to carry out a waste clean-up.



Site selection

If the waste clean-up is part of a larger CAFW project then it is important that the site for the clean-up is part of or related to the larger CAFW project site. Choose a site that has obvious waste pollution (trash, plastic bottles, litter) and can be seen by the public so that the clean-up will have public appeal. Potential clean-up sites may be identified by local community members, environmental organizations, or from recent news headlines. Consult with key stakeholders when choosing the site.



Safety

First and foremost, volunteer safety is paramount. It is best practice to develop a safety plan that can easily be deployed on the event day. Ensure appropriate protective clothing is provided and worn and that people are aware of the risks. Be sure to communicate that volunteers are responsible for their own safety.

If appropriate, consider having volunteers sign waivers and provide emergency contact information before the clean-up. Make a plan for controlling the site, identifying and keeping track of volunteers and ensuring basic safety. Consider sending volunteers out as a team – two or more volunteers work together. Basic first aid equipment and knowledgeable people should be on hand in case of an incident.

It is particularly important to consider access. Is the site publicly or privately owned, and can permission be obtained to work in the area. Also consider how volunteers can get to the site and how the waste collected can be removed. Also consider where vehicles will park and if they will be safe and secure. Encourage people to keep valuables with them and consider providing sealable bags so volunteers can keep their phones dry and safe.

Freshwater bodies are particularly impacted by the weather. Have a good awareness of the predicted weather for the clean-up and plans for notifying volunteers of weather-related changes.



People and equipment

It is important to match the number of expected volunteers with the amount of work to be done. Avoid having too many or too few volunteers for the planned activity. Consider asking volunteers to pre-register for the event and avoid having unexpected volunteers arriving at the site on the day.

Keeping volunteers well informed, before during and after the event, is essential to having a safe, enjoyable and productive day. Important information includes:

- Why the clean-up is taking place and what the project plans to achieve
- What is expected from the volunteers in terms of time and commitment
- What equipment they should bring (e.g., suitable footwear and clothing, sun hats and sun protection, protective equipment, equipment for waste collection such as garden rakes, shovels etc.)
- What will be provided (e.g. transport, refreshments, equipment, training)
- Safety and security consideration including meeting locations and times
- Where photos of the event can be downloaded to or uploaded from

During the event assign leaders to guide volunteers in their clean-up activities. Consider designating individuals to manage and communicate with interested community members attracted by the activity.



Waste collection and disposal

Ensure there will be a sufficient number of tools for collecting the solid waste and enough receptacles into which to collect it. It is important to plan for transport and disposal of the collected waste and, particularly if recyclables are to be recovered, where and how this will be done. Consider informing waste collection/disposal sites beforehand and be aware of their opening and closing times.

If refreshments are going to be distributed, it is a good idea to provide them at the beginning of the activity or consider providing hand sanitizer or a hand-washing station before distributing them.

Seek donations of equipment and other support from stakeholders such as businesses or local authorities. Schools, religious organizations or sports clubs may be a good source of volunteers. Responsible local authorities are often able to support waste clean-ups by providing trucks to transport waste or other heavy machinery and tools.



Monitoring and reporting

Measuring the success of the event is important. Consider the information required for reporting before the event and create a plan to collect this information during the event. Once the event is over it can be very difficult to collect information.

Some things to consider:

- Designate a photographer to take photos before, during, and after the event. The photographer should obtain the volunteer's permission/release of any volunteer photographed (if youth from parent or guardian).
- How will the type and amount of waste removed be measured (i.e., number of bags, weight of waste, number of truck loads)
- Record the names and contact details of volunteers for purposes of reporting out details of your clean-up
- Measure the area that has been cleaned (e.g., km of river)
- Consider interviewing volunteers to get their opinion on the event.



Register the clean-up or update the details of ongoing CAFW projects. Consider monitoring long term impact of the clean-up by regularly visiting and taking photos of the site days, weeks, or months after the clean-up.