



Alice Ferguson Foundation

Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup

Cleanup Leader Planning Guide

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#PotomacCleanup

The Alice Ferguson Foundation

Our mission is to connect people to the natural world, sustainable agricultural practices and the cultural heritage of their local watershed through education, stewardship and advocacy.

About the Potomac Cleanup

The Potomac River Watershed Cleanup, known as the Potomac Cleanup, connects people to their local watershed through stewardship.

The Potomac Cleanup has grown from a small shoreline cleanup at Piscataway National Park to a watershed wide network. What started as a few cleanup events along the Potomac River is now a regional event spanning Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

Since 1989, the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup has:

- Engaged more than 170,000 volunteers.
- Collaborated with more than 500 community partners.
- Prevented more than 8 million pounds of trash from entering the Potomac River.

The Alice Ferguson Foundation has spearheaded the Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup since 1989. We provide tools, training, and support to community leaders organizing trash cleanups.

The Potomac River

The Potomac River, our Nation's River, is a river worth protecting. The Potomac River flows 338 miles, from the Allegheny Mountains to the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, ultimately joining the Atlantic Ocean. An area of land (including its waterways) flowing into a larger waterway is called a *watershed*. The Potomac River watershed includes parts of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and the entire District of Columbia. The Potomac River watershed drainage area covers 14,760 sq. miles and is a tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

Fun, healthy, and educational adventures are among the many benefits waterways offer communities. The Potomac River provides important habitat for abundance of life underwater and throughout the watershed (including us!). Eighty percent of people in the watershed depend on the river for the water we drink (and cook with, bathe with, etc.). It is imperative we keep the Potomac River and its tributaries healthy. Clean land and safe waters create healthy lives and strong communities.

We hope you will take the opportunity to enjoy the tributaries that sustain us. We look forward to recognizing your successes at our events and online. Your efforts are part of a larger movement, a growing community of clean water advocates.

This guide is intended to serve as an online training for leading a trash cleanup.

See you in April!

How to Organize a Trash Cleanup

The Cleanup Leader coordinates local cleanup events with support from the Alice Ferguson Foundation. As a Cleanup Leader, it is your responsibility to:

- ✓ Choose a location
- ✓ Arrange land approval and trash disposal
- ✓ Register your event on the Trash Network (trashnetwork.fergusonfoundation.org)
- ✓ Spread the word
- ✓ On the day of the event: welcome volunteers and review safety protocols
- ✓ Submit your results on the Trash Network

Here are a few guidelines to help you complete each task:

Choose a Location

A cleanup can be at a park, city block, shoreline, or in the water. When choosing a location, consider the following criteria:

- ✓ Is the site littered? There should be enough trash to keep volunteers engaged for the duration of the cleanup.
- ✓ Is the litter accessible? Trash in a thick patch of thorny vegetation or on a steep riverbank may be more difficult to reach and require proper tools and clothing.
- ✓ Is the site location accessible? Consider how volunteers will transport to the site, via either foot, metro, or driving and parking.
- ✓ Is there a public restroom nearby? Locations near recreation centers, libraries or other public spaces are more likely to have a public restroom.

Your location should be a place in your community that mean a lot to you. Take pride in your cleanup site!

Land Approval and Trash Disposal

Land Approval

Once you choose a location, you will need to get permission from the landowner to host a cleanup event. Your site may be public land, private property, or part of a national park.

- ✓ Visit PotomacCleanup.org to find land owner partners in your jurisdiction.
- ✓ Land permission promotes your safety.
- ✓ It also offers site specific information, such as any construction projects, safety hazards, or wildlife and plant details.

Transparent communication is an important step in this process. It's usually the landowner who can provide the trash (and recycling) pick up.

Trash and Recycling Pick Up & Disposal

Now that you have collected the data and picked up the trash and recycling, what should you do with it? It is the responsibility of the Site Leader to arrange for trash and/or recycling disposal. There are a few ways to take out the trash:

- ✓ Work with the land owner (city, National Park Service (NPS), Department of Public Works (DPW), etc). Ask them the best place to leave the bags.
- ✓ Ask a local business, school, or faith center if you can use their dumpster.
- ✓ Divide the cleanup bags among volunteers and put the trash & recyclables out with curbside pickup.
- ✓ Call the local landfill and ask for a dumping waiver. They may be able to provide you with a waived fee so you can properly dispose of the refuse for free at your local facility.
- ✓ Have a dumpster on site. This is good for sites expecting to have 50+ bags of trash. Check in with your jurisdiction first, and if they cannot provide a dumpster you can ask your local waste hauler to donate a dumpster for the day, including drop off and pick up.

Thank you for ensuring all trash is securely bagged and in the correct place for pickup!

Register on the Trash Network

The Trash Network is an online platform for the public to easily find cleanup events. This is a great tool for regional education, policy, regulation, and press supporting a Trash Free Potomac Watershed.

Here's how it works:

- ✓ Go to TrashNetwork.FergusonFoundation.org
- ✓ Create a login
- ✓ Create a Site
 - This is the location.
 - Remember to use GPS coordinates!
- ✓ Create an Event
 - This includes the date and time of your cleanup event
- ✓ Share your event link with your community!

Data from cleanups throughout the region is uploaded to the Trash Network and synced with our Fieldscope map to further interpret data. We publicly share all cleanup data.

Spread the Word

Community cleanups are most successful when the Site Leader shares the event with their networks. Consider posting your Trash Network event link and/or a flyer at the following locations:

- ✓ Community Center
- ✓ Online Listservs
- ✓ Schools (many students need Student Service Learning hours!)
- ✓ Worship House
- ✓ Neighborhood Listservs (ie: Nextdoor)
- ✓ Local paper or radio
- ✓ Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Eventbrite)

Cleanups are a great opportunity for community engagement!

- ✓ Get outside and enjoy your local watershed.
- ✓ Meet and greet old friends and new neighbors
- ✓ Intergenerational event

Everyone has a relationship with trash. Cleanups can serve as a transformational experience for volunteers who otherwise would not consider themselves environmental stewards.

Day of Event: The Cleanup!

Before the volunteers arrive for the cleanup:

- ✓ Prepare supplies (bags and gloves)
- ✓ Have waivers/sign in sheets and pens ready for participants
- ✓ Take photographs of the site before the cleanup #TrashTag
- ✓ Remove any hazardous items

Welcome Introduction:

- ✓ Thank volunteers for being here
- ✓ Introduce yourself and let volunteers know that this event is part of a larger effort, the annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup.
- ✓ Share why you care about trash free waters. Examples:
 - This is the water we drink. 80% of residents in the Potomac watershed source their drinking water from the Potomac River.
 - Litter is harmful to local wildlife and ocean species.
 - Trash free waters and communities provide clean land, safe waters, and healthy lives.

Safety Talk

- ✓ Do not pick up anything that you are uncomfortable touching.
- ✓ Do use a HAZMAT container for certain items. See the safety guidelines.
- ✓ Do not uncap bottles to drain liquid. Leave the cap on and throw it in the trash. The liquid could be dangerous or unsanitary.
- ✓ There are some items, like weapons and homeless encampments that you should not remove.

Logistics

- ✓ Distribute gloves and trash bags.
- ✓ Have participants sort trash (yellow bags) and recycling (blue bags) as they pick up items. Think of blue bags for bottles. Generally the blue recycling bag is largely filled with plastic beverage bottles.
- ✓ Identify the boundaries to be cleaned up.
- ✓ Declare a time and place for everyone to be back.
- ✓ Mark the location for the bags to be placed for removal

Wrap Up

- ✓ Share data among the group (and record on your Results Tally Sheet).
- ✓ Collect gloves to be washed and reused.
- ✓ Take photos of the trash free location and of volunteers. #TrashTag
- ✓ Thank volunteers for coming and share how they can stay involved.

Submit Results on the Trash Network

Data is an integral part of the cleanup experience. The information helps environmental agencies track progress toward removing trash from the region's waterways and informs policy to further regulate the sources of trash.

To Record Data

- ✓ Review the Results Tally Sheet with volunteers during the welcome introduction.

To Report Data

- ✓ Login to the Trash Network (TrashNetwork.fergusonfoundation.org)
- ✓ Click 'Events' on the blue banner at the top of the page
- ✓ Click 'Results' on the right hand side of your event listings
- ✓ Submit and Save!
- ✓ You can also physically return, call, or email in the Results Tally Sheet

Quantitative data contributes to legislation, increases public awareness, and justifies the mandate to clean-up our rivers. Thank you for contributing to the data!

Visit the Site Leader Center at PotomacCleanup.org to register your event!

Thank you for your leadership for trash free waters and communities!

Day of Event Master Checklist

Here is a suggested checklist and times to help organize your cleanup day!

Pre-Cleanup Photography (8:30)

- Take multiple pictures of the existing “trashy” state of your site.

Organize Supplies & Materials (8:35am)

Required Supplies

- Bags (blue – recyclables, yellow – trash)
- Gloves
- First-Aid Kit
- Safety/Hazmat Information & Hazmat Container
- Required Paperwork:
 - Volunteer Sign In Waiver
 - Results Tally Sheet

Optional Supplies

- Directional signs to your site (put out a day or two early if possible)
- Extra tools (wheelbarrow, rakes, shovels, grabbers, nets, etc.)

Welcome Volunteers (9:00am)

- Introduce yourself and thank volunteers for participating.
- Make sure everyone has signed in.
- Note: This is part of the annual **Potomac River Watershed Cleanup**.
- Explain trash/recycling procedure & data collection.
- Point out location of restroom and drinking fountain, if accessible.

Safety (9:15am)

- Go over Safety/HAZMAT and Sharps Pick-up Procedures.
- Ask volunteers to report HAZMAT items so that you or a special volunteer can retrieve items safely. (See “HAZMAT & Safety Guidelines”)
- Point out possible hazardous land features & slippery terrain. Remind volunteers to be careful of any vegetation or wildflowers as they work.
- Alert volunteers to first aid kit location and where to find you in case of an emergency.

Note: It is a good idea to have a first aid kit in the cleanup leader’s possession.

**Organize
Volunteers
(9:20am)**

- Assign volunteers to specific jobs: trash pickers, trash bag transfer people, volunteer sign-in greeter, data recorder, recyclers/separators, safety/HAZMAT helper, rover to check needs of the group, photographers/interesting item collectors, etc.
- Designate a visible place for the greeter to sign-in any latecomers.
- Identify trash collection stations where trash, large bulky items and recyclables will be placed for removal.
- Distribute supplies.

**Clean Up!
(9:30am –
11:45am)**

- Separate recyclables into blue bags and trash into yellow bags. Collect tires, but do not put tires in trash bags.
- Tally special trash items using the Results Tally Sheet.
- Use plastic grocery bags for small children and then place those in the larger trash bags.
- If tide is high, work your way out as tide recedes. If tide is low, start at waterline.

**Haul Trash
For Removal
(11:45am)**

- Ensure all bags are securely tied and in the correct location for pickup.
- Neatly stack trash and bulky items for easy transport.

**Wrap Up &
Take Photos
(12:00pm)**

- Record final counts on the Results Tally Sheet.
- Estimate the weight of large bulky items and ask volunteers for “interesting items found.”
- Celebrate!!! Take group photos of your volunteers and their accomplishment.
- Remind everyone to visit PotomacCleanup.org for final results and additional ways to stay engaged..

**Report Your
Data
(12:15pm)**

- **Important! REPORT YOUR DATA!**
 - Phone: 301-292-5665,
 - Online: trashnetwork.fergusonfoundation.org
 - E-mail: potomaccleanup@fergusonfoundation.org
- Report the following required forms:
 - *Volunteer Sign-In*
 - *Results: Data Tally Sheet*

Safety Guidelines & HAZMAT Info

What is HAZMAT?: HAZMAT (short for hazardous materials) include items such as hypodermic needles, any sealed containers filled with fluid, personal protection and hygiene products, unknown toxic chemicals and any medical waste.

How To Make A HAZMAT Container: Use a heavy plastic detergent bottle with a screw top & handle for ease in carrying. Loosely attach a pair of tongs to the handle. Clearly mark the container with a [HAZMAT label](#).

Safety and HAZMAT Collection Tips:

- Individuals with open wounds should not expose them to the stream water.
- Wear protective gloves and boots to avoid sharp objects.
- Site leaders should point out any safety hazards such as particularly muddy areas, steep banks, rocky areas, etc.
- Review with volunteers the appropriate safety precautions regarding materials not to be handled: sealed barrels, gas canisters, full beverage containers, aerosol cans (they may explode if there is compressed gas inside)
- Do not open any unopened containers.
- Avoid eating, drinking, smoking, or touching eyes, and mouth, until hands are washed.
- Medical waste & HAZMAT materials should only be handled by the site leader or other designated leader and disposed of in a HAZMAT container.
- Have a first aid kit easily accessible & in a convenient, visible location.
- Have clean and sterile water on hand for washing and drinking.
- The person collecting HAZMAT materials should wear a double layer of latex gloves and steel toe or thick leather boots — not canvas shoes!
- HAZMAT materials should be picked up with a pair of tongs – do not allow contact with skin!
- When placing a needle in the HAZMAT container, place the container on the ground before inserting the needle, point down, using tongs. For more information, visit the following link on **Sharps Procedures**.
- At the conclusion of the cleanup: remove & dispose of the top pair of gloves, sterilize the tongs, remove and dispose of second pair of gloves and container in a sealed trash bag. Wash hands carefully. For extra protection, you may fill the HAZMAT container with plaster of Paris.
- If a volunteer is pricked by a needle wipe off skin and clean with alcohol. Then wash with soap and running water. To avoid risk of infection injured person should consult a physician.