



Fact Sheet: Staying Safe

Assessing the situation

It can be helpful to think ahead and be prepared for potential dangers or hazards before you embark on your clean up, so that you know what to do in an emergency. One way of doing this is to carry out a risk assessment. For further information about risk assessments please see the following websites:

- [Health & Safety Executive](#) provides useful downloads targeted at employers but they could be adapted for voluntary groups.
- [BTCV](#) runs one day training courses in risk assessment, first aid and other topics relating to organising and leading environmental projects.
- [Tunbridge Wells](#) has a sample risk assessment form for a clean up.

Some of the issues to take into account when planning your clean up are listed below, with recommendations about how to keep participants safe and well. If, however, you decide that the area you have identified carries too many risks for you and your group, it may be better to choose an alternative location for your clean up. We hope you have a fun and safe event.

Health & Safety

On any clean up, it is wise to take a first aid kit and anti-bacterial wipes with you. At the event you should notify your volunteers of who the first aider is and what to do in case of illness or injury. For a larger scale event, you may wish to contact [St Andrews' First Aid](#) for support and participants should be notified of the first aid arrangements on arrival. Anyone who has been picking up litter should clean their hands, arms and fingernails thoroughly afterwards.

You should ensure that volunteers are dressed appropriately for the weather and terrain, eg in warm waterproof clothing if it's wet and windy, or wearing sunscreen if you are lucky enough to have good weather; and strong, comfortable boots or shoes. Protective gloves are also advisable. Before setting out, volunteers should be warned to look out for potential hazards (as identified in your risk assessment) and to take precautions to avoid and protect against them. See the table on the next page for examples of issues or hazards to be addressed and recommended action to take.

Insurance

Obtaining Public Liability Insurance is advisable if you are planning a litter pick. It will provide cover for your legal liability arising from accidental damage or injury (to a member of the public or their property) that may occur during the event. Many groups already have relevant cover eg educational institutions or groups that are part of a larger or national body, but if not, you should contact your local council whose insurance may cover this type of event. Otherwise, staff should be able to give advice about how other groups in your area tackle this issue, eg through [BTCV's Community Network](#) membership scheme.

Issue	Action
Use of specialist equipment	Demonstrate how to use equipment in a way that will minimise the risk of injury, eg taking care not to overreach with litter-pickers or carry sharp instruments at eye level.
Moving heavy items	Bend at the knees when moving heavy objects to avoid back injury.
Removing drug-related litter: needles and syringes etc	Many councils have a rapid response team that will remove hypodermic needles or drugs-related litter for you. You should not risk your own safety by attempting to touch or remove it yourselves. If you have identified this as an imminent risk, please contact your council for advice.
Finding flytipped or toxic waste: unidentified cans or canisters, oil drums, poisons, insecticides, clinical waste, and other hazardous substances	If you see someone flytipping or if you discover dumped waste, please report it to the Dumb Dumpers 24 hour stopline on 08452 30 40 90 for further investigation by the relevant authorities.
Removing sharps items: broken glass, sharp or rusted metal	Use safe containers, eg sharps boxes (or a sealed biscuit tin), for collection as pieces can protrude from refuse sacks and cause injury.
Negotiating roadsides/traffic: busy roads	Wear fluorescent arm bands, hi-visibility vests or tabards if working anywhere near traffic. Make sure you can get off the road easily to make room for traffic. Chose sections of road where you can be seen clearly by approaching drivers.
Dealing with natural hazards: fast flowing water, currents or tides, steep/slippery/unstable banks, sharp rocks, mud holes, low lying branches	Take extra care near hazards and make sure participants are fit enough to cope with these obstacles. If working near water, make sure non-swimmers and children keep away from the edge, provide a supply of lifebelts or jackets, use a safety line and have a trained lifesaver present. Check tide times as appropriate.
Working near inland water, eg rivers and canals	Provide rescue equipment and advise against litter collection involving leaning over the water. Contact with water and the water edge has the risk of Leptospirosis. Hand-washing facilities are advised, and in the case of accidental immersion call 999 as the water will be extremely cold!
Finding giant hogweed	Seek immediate medical attention if skin comes into contact with this injurious weed and blistering, irritation or rashes occur.
Dealing with other hazards: derelict buildings, electric fences (identified by yellow warning signs), abandoned vehicles	Do not be tempted to approach these hazards. If you are concerned about anything along these lines, contact your local council for advice.
Working with children and vulnerable adults	Take particular care over the supervision of participants. Consider the ages and capabilities of those involved and make sure there are sufficient able-bodied adults to assist, eg in the case of young children there should be at least one adult to every four children. Do not be over ambitious and be prepared to adapt your event to suit circumstances.
Keeping in touch	Use walkie talkies or mobile phones to keep in touch with participants if the group is split up, and locate the nearest public phone for use in an emergency.