



Department of Water Resources

'HOW-TO' STREAM CLEANUP GUIDE



This guide is meant to serve as a 'Do It Yourself' handbook for those dedicated volunteers who wish to organize and carry out a stream cleanup on their own accord.

If you are interested in receiving free supplies or performing regular cleanups, please visit Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful's website at www.gwinnettcbo.org for a list of programs.

INTRODUCTION

Why organize a stream cleanup?

Gwinnett needs your help to remove litter from our water bodies. Organizing a stream cleanup can not only immediately impact our waterways in a positive way by removing the litter that we pick up, but it can also have a long-term impact, by helping participants to understand how our behaviors can affect our environment. Volunteers at a cleanup can see first-hand what happens when we are careless with our waste, and will hopefully be impacted in a way that causes them to be a life-long protector of our water resources.

Non-point source pollution, or pollution that cannot be traced to a single source, is one of the biggest threats to the health of our waterways. Non-point source pollution can be comprised of many different things, including motor oil, fertilizers, paint, and even dog poo. However, one of the most obvious types of non-point source pollution is litter. How does all this litter and other pollutants end up in our water bodies? Watersheds!

Are you familiar with a watershed? A watershed is an area of land where all of the water drains to the same location or a common point. A watershed includes not just the waterbodies in the area, such as lakes and streams, but all of the land that drains water to those waterbodies as well. In a watershed, rainfall flows downhill from high points and makes its way into streams, lakes, and ponds. This flowing rainfall on the surface of the ground is called 'runoff.' Storm drains are largely responsible for transporting this runoff away from roads and parking lots and into the nearest water body. Stormwater runoff is not treated before it enters these water bodies, which means that any litter or pollution left on the ground or that is disposed of outdoors is likely to end up in our water resources.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

- Your group must specify a group leader to act as the designated point of contact. The Group Leader must be an adult at least 18 years of age or older.
- Individuals under the age of 18 may participate, but only if supervised by an adult and have written parental consent. The recommended minimum age to volunteer is 10 years of age.
- Cleanups should be scheduled during fair weather and daylight hours. If inclement weather prevents the cleanup, plan for a rain check.
- Disposal of collected trash is the responsibility of the organizer. In some cases, Gwinnett DWR or GC&B may be able to assist with bulky items or large numbers of tires.
- The goal of a stream cleanup is not to get every single item. It may be unsafe to get some items. Clean as much as possible while staying safe and observing property boundaries.
- Respect your surroundings: every plant and creature has its part, don't kill or crush anything on your site.



SAFETY GUIDELINES AND WHAT TO EXPECT

Remember the WATCH acronym.

- **Wildlife:** Ants/anthills, bees/wasps, snakes/turtles, strays, coyote, fox, raccoon, poison ivy
- **Awareness:** Traffic, broken glass, mud and/or loose rocks, deep pools or holes, wildlife
- **Team:** Never cleanup alone. Use the buddy system (two or more), ask for help from team members, don't hurt yourself lifting heavy objects by yourself
- **Communication:** Discuss allergies and the appropriate responses with team leaders, tell team leaders and members about unsafe or hazardous objects
- **Health:** Wear gloves, wear sunscreen, stay hydrated (even in winter), and remember that NO piece of trash is worth risking your health or your life!

Do not cleanup in the dark.

If an item is so embedded in the soil that you cannot remove it with one hard tug, do not remove it. Some items eventually become more helpful as bank stabilization than to be removed, and it is important not to risk the strain on your body.

Be sure to wash your hands after completing the cleanup.

If you observe any of the following conditions at your stream site, DO NOT enter the water; contact the appropriate entity listed on the "Who to Call" list:

- **STOP!** If you see a pipe discharging odd looking/smelling substance into the water (potential pollution).
- **STOP!** If you see large quantities of dead fish or other organisms (Fish Kill).
- **STOP!** If you see closed or leaking drums near the water.



SELECTING A SITE

If you have a site in mind already, there are some things to remember while planning your cleanup event:

- Is it public or private property? If private, please gain approval from the property owner before accessing the property. See the attached 'Property Owner Consent Form' as an example of owner approval.
- Is it safe and easily accessible? This may depend on the time of year. A site that you select in January may no longer be accessible in May due to vegetative overgrowth.

If you do not have a site in mind and are looking for a space to cleanup, contact Gwinnett DWR six to eight weeks prior to your preferred cleanup date so we can help you identify an appropriate site near your desired location.

Before you finalize your site selection, consider where your volunteers can park and then congregate to get their supplies at the beginning of the event and drop trash/supplies at the end of the event.

This can be another property access concern. Always ask permission to use any property.

- Use the back of buildings or the fringe of parking lots so your group doesn't compete with parking space for customers.
- Once your site is selected, walk the site thoroughly to familiarize yourself with the surroundings, topography, potential hazards, passage-ways, and escape routes.



PLANNING THE CLEANUP EVENT

1. Get together a group of volunteers who are ready and willing to participate!
 - a. A great resource is the Rivers Alive program. Visit www.riversalive.org to post a cleanup event and attract volunteers or to find other cleanup events in your area.
 - b. Use Social Media to find potential volunteers in your own backyard.
 - c. Make a flyer to be distributed at work, school, religious gatherings, or clubs.
2. Select a time and date for the event
 - a. Start early in the summertime to avoid the high temperatures (8:00am or 9:00am).
 - b. Start a little later in the morning to let the temperatures rise (9:00am or 10:00am).
3. Procure all necessary supplies for volunteers, including:
 - a. Gloves: all volunteers should at minimum be wearing single-use nitrile or latex gloves to protect from bacteria
 - i. It is highly recommended to wear a second pair of work or garden gloves, to protect from sharp objects or plants.
 - b. Trash bags
 - i. Use tear resistant bags with the weave. Cheap trash bags tend to rip while carrying them through the woods and briars, making more of a mess and requiring more bags.
 - ii. Use kitchen sized bags, 13 gallons – larger bags will get too heavy to carry over long distances
 - c. Buckets for sharps and broken glass
 - i. The bucket is not for disposal, just to carry the items through the terrain so the sharp edges don't tear a bag onsite
 - ii. Transfer items from the bucket to a bag when the bucket is full
 - d. First aid kits for team leaders
 - i. Focus on sting relief and minor cuts/bruises
 - e. Other supplies to consider:
 - i. Potato rake – Helpful for reaching under brush to pull out trash items.
 - ii. Pocket knife – Can be used to pop sports balls to take up less bag space.
 - iii. Flagging tape – Great for marking your path through the woods. Remember to collect when cleanup is finished!

4. Determine disposal of the trash
 - a. Discard trash bags in volunteers' own dumpster/garbage bins – send a little home with each volunteer.
 - b. If the site is a commercial property with a dumpster, ask the building owner/occupant if you can use their dumpster. Partnerships are valuable. If using this dumpster impedes with the businesses own ability to use it, or if there is not one, you may be able to partner with a commercial trash hauler who will pick up upon request.
 - c. Recycling: Recycling dirty recyclables or containers full of mud/dirt/sand can be difficult. Many recyclers can't process dirty recyclables or old/brittle plastics.
 - d. Tires: some retailers will take tires from a community cleanup for free. It is best to arrange for this before the day of the event.
 - i. Bridgestone Tires4ward Program
5. Notify volunteers how to properly prepare for the cleanup
 - a. Wear long pants and closed toe shoes
 - b. Dress in layers if the weather is cold
 - c. Eat a good breakfast with water
 - d. Bring with them:
 - i. Water bottle
 - ii. Snack
 - iii. Bug repellent
 - iv. Sunscreen
 - e. Send out waivers ahead of time.
 - i. Volunteers can bring signed waiver with them to the event and save time.
 - ii. Waivers for cleanups can be found on the 'Organize a Cleanup' tab of the RiversAlive website.

DAY OF THE CLEANUP EVENT

1. The Group Leader should arrive at the meeting location at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the event.
 - a. Be ready with extra waivers and supplies.
 - b. Walk the site to identify any conditions that may have changed
 - c. Hang flags throughout the site if necessary to:
 - i. Help guide the group through site
 - ii. Identify meeting locations, stopping points, hazards, alternate routes
2. When ready to begin, make sure to speak to volunteers about the following:
 - a. Mention the importance of the cleanup efforts and how they affect the watershed; include stormwater and non-point source pollution topics





- b. Safety guidelines: Refer back to 'Safety Guidelines and What to Expect,' and review the WATCH acronym with volunteers
 - c. Get a head count of the volunteers before you begin
 - i. Volunteers should remain within eyesight of team members at all times
3. Take photos so you can compare before and after
 4. Take a head count often during the event; check the volunteers at the front of the group and those at the back
 5. The team leader can pick up some trash, but is mostly responsible for keeping the team safe, on task, and moving in the right direction. The team leader should also call for breaks, recommend water intake, help with heavy items, and keep track of time.
 6. Make sure all bags are full but not too heavy, and tied tight. Put small bags into larger bags, as long as they don't get too heavy.
 7. Arrange large, loose, or bulky items so that they can be handled safely.
 8. Confirm that all of your volunteers returned from the cleanup to the meeting location.
 9. Thank your volunteers!
 10. Dispose of your trash.

WHO TO CALL

Gwinnett County DWR 24-Hour Emergency Hotline

678.376.7000

- Water Quality Issues (Potential Pollution)
- Structural issues with storm drain or detention pond
- Evidence of illegal dumping to a storm drain
- Broken or leaking pipes in or near a waterway

Gwinnett Environmental Health

770.963.5132

- Leaking or failing septic system

EPD – Atlanta District

800.241.4113

- Fish kills
- Closed or leaking drums, barrels

UGA Extension Service

678.377.4010

- Identification of plants and animals

Additional Resources

Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources

- Find out more about water conservation: www.dwrconserve.com
- Learn more about how to handle fats, oils, and grease, or the FOG Mob: www.unclogthefog.com

Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful

- Become an Adopt-a-Stream volunteer.
- Become an Adopt-a-Road partner and help pick up litter before it reaches the streams: www.gwinnettcb.org/gwinnettcb/programs/adopt-road/
- Find out where in Gwinnett you can take your recycling and how to properly dispose of things like household chemicals and medicines with the “Recycle Now” database: www.gwinnettcb.org/recycling

Gwinnett Environment and Heritage Center

- Sign up to tour Gwinnett’s award winning F. Wayne Hill Water Reclamation Facility
- Visit any of the Center’s water-based exhibits, including the Blue Planet Theater, to be immersed in the wonders of water, as well as Discover h2o, to learn about the water cycle and much more.

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

- Become a certified volunteer to perform water quality monitoring through the Georgia Adopt-a-Stream program: www.adoptastream.georgia.gov
- Find, organize, and track cleanup initiatives throughout the state with Rivers Alive: www.riversalive.georgia.gov