



# 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 out there!



## COVID-19 Safety Protocols

Please follow your local government and CDC recommendations before planning a cleanup event. See the CDC's website for more information – [Considerations for Events and Gatherings](#)

If you are planning a cleanup event please adhere to these guidelines recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for the safety of our community.

- Wear a mask in public spaces.
- Practice Social Distancing - Volunteers should stay at least 6 feet away from people they do not live with.
- Follow group gathering numbers based on your local jurisdiction (i.e. no more than 10 people per group, etc.)
  - We recommend that volunteers do cleanups with family and friends they live with.
- If soap and water are not available provide hand sanitizer at cleanup events for volunteers.
- Have volunteers RSVP for cleanups so you are able to keep track of the number attendees (use portals like Eventbrite, Facebook, etc.)
  - Before the cleanup day have the RSVP'd volunteers sign waivers virtually
    - [Alice Ferguson Foundation Online Waiver](#)
  - Have a bit.ly or barcode for volunteers to use to access waivers online to sign on the day of the event if they did not sign prior. Print waivers just in case volunteers cannot access online waiver and have them take a picture and send it to you. We strongly encourage volunteers sign waivers prior to the event.
- Provide a contactless supply pick up for volunteers and provide safety briefings to small socially distant volunteers before sending them out to cleanup.
- Before even organizing a cleanup please make sure that you have a way to dispose of the trash after your cleanup.
  - More information can be found below and who you need to contact can be found on our [Cleanup Leader page](#).
- Volunteers should not participate if, in the last two weeks, they have (a) experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms (to include fever, cough, sore throat, respiratory illness, difficulty breathing), (b) had close contact with or cared for someone diagnosed with COVID-19, or (c) been in, or been in close contact with someone who has been in an area that is currently under a shelter in place order or currently under a US travel ban restriction. Event leaders will remind participants of this as part of their safety talk at the start of the event.



## 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](http://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.

### COVID-19 Related

- ✓ Is there enough space to practice social distancing?
- ✓ Is there access to a bathroom with soap and water?

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.

### **COVID-19 Related**

- ✓ **Is the Park or Jurisdiction open?**
- ✓ **What are their recommendations in regard to COVID-19?**
  - **See your local jurisdictions recommendations.**

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 Cleanup 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.

### **COVID -19 Related**

- ✓ **Is the County or Park staff able to remove the trash or will volunteers need to take trash home for removal?**
- ✓ **Remember to check with you local Jurisdiction and Park for regulations in regards to COVID-19 pandemic.**

*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](https://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!

### **COVID-19 Related**

- ✓ During the pandemic we encourage all Cleanup Leaders to have volunteers register through a free online platform (Example – Eventbrite, Google Forms, etc) and allow only a certain number of attendees.
  - Before the cleanup event, send volunteers waivers to sign online, or to print and send to you via email or fax to avoid contact on the day of the event.
    - [Alice Ferguson Foundation Online Waiver](#)

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 Cleanup 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)
- ✓ Take photographs of the site before the cleanup #TrashTag
- ✓ Remove any hazardous items

### COVID-19 Related

- ✓ Have the list of your registered attendees ready and whether they have signed waivers
- ✓ If volunteers have not yet signed waivers bring paper waivers with you and have the volunteers take a picture of the waiver to send to you or a link to the waiver for them to sign digitally.

### 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 and COVID-19 Related Safety

- ✓ Do not pick up anything that you are uncomfortable touching.
- ✓ Do use a HAZMAT container for certain items. See the safety guidelines.
- ✓ Do not uncup 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.
- ✓ Go over social distancing, mask requirements, and COVID-19 related safety list above



## **Logistics**

- ✓ Provide a contactless glove and trash bag pick up for volunteers.
- ✓ 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 or directions volunteers will need to take to safely remove trash to designated area.

## **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](http://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 Cleanup Leader Center at [PotomacCleanup.org](http://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 for contactless pickup (8:35am)

#### Required Supplies

- Bags (blue – recyclables, yellow – trash)
- Gloves
- First-Aid Kit
- Safety/Hazmat Information & Hazmat Container
- Hand Sanitizer
- Required Paperwork:
  - Print out of Volunteer registrations / who signed virtual waivers
  - Bring blanks waivers just in case and have URL ready for digital signing - [Alice Ferguson Foundation Online 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.)
- Cleaning products to clean off reusable supplies after handling

### Welcome Volunteers (9:00am)

- Introduce yourself and thank volunteers for participating.
- Make sure everyone has signed waivers.
- 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.



○ **Go over COVID-19 Safety Protocols**

**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 welcome any latecomers.
- Identify trash collection stations where trash, large bulky items and recyclables will be placed for removal.
- Direct volunteers where they can pick up 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 photos of your volunteers and their accomplishments.
- 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](http://trashnetwork.fergusonfoundation.org)
  - E-mail: [potomaccleanup@fergusonfoundation.org](mailto: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.
- Cleanup 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 cleanup 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.