

PREPARATION GUIDE FOR LITTER PICKING



Advice on running a successful litter pick

This document provides some advice on how to run a successful litter picking event. Whether the event is a one off action in your community or you are an established community or voluntary group, you will find advice on the risks, precautions and insurance applicable to litter picking.

Preparation Guide For Litter Picking

ADVICE ON RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL LITTER PICK

There are a number of risks that present themselves to groups who organised litter picking. When volunteers come together for the good of the community, taking pride in their public spaces, it can be easy to skip the preparation and thought required to run a successful litter pick.

This brief guide will look at preparation, site inspection and the insurance implications to try and help your community group run a successful and safe event.

For further advice please contact us at www.ladbrook.co.uk.

PRODUCE A RISK ASSESSMENT

Create a risk assessment, if you have no experience of this, download a good template, the Health and Safety Executive have a [simple template](#) for one. It is easy to do and the rest of this guide might give you some ideas for matters to consider.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE SITE OWNERS PERMISSION

It seems obvious but ensure that you have the site owners permission. Many councils will grant permission only if you have organised proper insurance and conducted a proper risk assessment. This might sound like an overkill but risks do exist, injuries and damage does occur on litter picks and insurance may be a compulsory requirement of the site owner and a sensible precaution for the group.

PREPARATION: MAKING SURE THE SITE IS SAFE

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— insurance —

There are lots of perils that litter picking groups need to be conscious of when assessing their site. Enthusiastic volunteers can and do get injured and a common sense approach to the physical nature of the area is important. Forgive pointing out the obvious but dangerous sites, areas where the public has no right of way, work sites are clearly no go areas.

Particular caution should be applied to picks on the roadside. Clearly the chance of being struck by a vehicle is a real and present risk. Litter picking where there is no pavement or pedestrian areas should be restricted. As per general road safety, litter pickers should move along verges or pavements facing into traffic too.

An absolute must is high visibility clothing and it is also advisable to check the forecast, if you are on a roadside and the weather is going to be bad, it might be better to call it off. It can be surprising how quickly traffic can be upon you, never allow litter pickers to collect rubbish from the road surface, that is not a job for volunteers.

Common injuries also occur when litter pickers work on slopes or in ditches. As a rule, as part of your site survey, identify areas that are not suitable and make sure volunteers know that these are to be avoided.

Finally, make sure as part of your site you consider any aspects of wildlife. Are there likely to be ground nesting wasps (mainly summer) or birds (mainly spring) that you might disturb.

Any site for a litter pick will present some degree of risk. Thinking about this will help you prepare volunteers better and keep everyone safe on the day.

From an insurance perspective, a community group has an obligation to both the public and it's volunteers. If in doubt, take a cautious approach. Volunteers can and do seek civil damages against organisations. The costs for defending such a claim and any damages can be insured for, please refer to the insurance section below.

EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

We have already highlighted the need for high visibility clothing as a must for volunteers. What else should be considered at the preparation stage?

Well, another 'absolute must' are good gloves. No contact should take place between the volunteers and the litter they are collecting.

You should also be advising and checking that volunteers are turning up in suitable clothes. Arms should ideally be covered in case a volunteer gets a bit enthusiastic trying to recover

litter from a thorny bush! Just as important is robust footwear that would withstand a sharp item underfoot and minimise the risk of slipping.

Grabbers are really important. They both remove the need for volunteers to handle litter and help reduce the need for bending. From groups we have spoken to, don't get the claw type grabbers, go for the tong ones, they are more effective. You will also want to take forks, shovels and a broom / brush and pan.

Finally, don't forget the rubbish bags! As well as bags (old shopping bags are perfect), have some sturdier containers, maybe a cardboard box for items that might tear the bags.

If you are a community group, church or charity that does not have this equipment, why not ask your local council. Often a local council will be happy to loan equipment to a group enthusiastically investing in the community environment.

PREPARING VOLUNTEERS FOR 'DANGERS IN THE LITTER'

There are some obvious hazards that a volunteer is likely to come across on a litter pick. Your pre pick site survey should identify hazards but also prepare your volunteers in case you missed something.

Glass is very common and obviously when broken presents a hazard. Bigger items might be removed by a grabber, smaller broken glass and the broom, brush, shovel and pan will be useful. Make sure no volunteer, no matter how gingerly, attempts to clear glass by hand, it will end in tears!

Sometimes on a litter pick, you might come across a site where the rubbish is more than simply the casually discarded items that accumulate over time. Fly tipping is an issue in UK communities and when litter pick events come face to face with this issue, they should be cautious.

If people are willing to illegally discard waste, it is unlikely they will have taken precautions regarding the safety of that waste. Unidentified liquids in containers could be hazardous and other harmful materials such as asbestos, *which can be more expensive to dispose of*, are more likely to be found at illegal dumps. Always report fly tipping and leave that clear up to the council.

Another issue, particularly in more secluded areas is the danger of finding items associated with drug use. Again, do not even attempt to clear up these materials, they should be referred to the council.

MANUAL HANDLING

As your litter picking day moves on, you will accumulate rubbish and it can become weighty. Volunteers should be prepared for this and prepared in the basics of manual handling.

If you have your equipment prepared properly, grabbers will minimise the need to pick rubbish up. This also reduces the need to handle rubbish, particularly helpful when there are items with sharp edges.

Volunteers should not have to exert great effort in moving items, this is a sign of over-stretching the capability of an individual, use more people on larger items.

After that, Google 'safe manual handling' and never forget '**straight back, bent knee!**'.

RUBBISH DISPOSAL

Have volunteers bring bags for rubbish disposal. For most rubbish, used supermarket plastic bags will be fine and mean that litter is collected in manageable bulk loads.

It can sometimes be hard to estimate exactly how much rubbish you are going to collect as it can be quite deceptive to judge. There is no reason, if it is an appropriate volume, that volunteers cannot dispose of rubbish through their own homes. If volumes do not allow for this then a trip to the council tip and recycling centre is in order. You need to plan for this and consider the right transport.

On recycling, you might not be able to get your volunteers to separate out litter and it might not be appropriate to do so. Particularly if the waste materials are unclean or unsafe in any way. However, a lot of community groups might wish to separate and recycle materials accordingly.

Again, disposal is an area where it might be worth speaking to the council ahead of the litter pick. They might provide other facilities for you, particularly on large litter picks.

CAN YOUNG VOLUNTEERS JOIN IN?

It is great for the community to get younger people involved and taking pride in their environment. If your community group organises this, it should also recognise the additional risk posed by having children on the site.

Any volunteers under the age of 18 should be supervised and their parents or guardians should have given permission. If you are working with children, appropriate consideration should be given to safeguarding issues too.

ON THE DAY

If the preparation has gone well, your activities on the day will just be a continuation of your considerations prior to the day.

- Check all volunteers are properly dressed in high visibility clothing, sturdy footwear and sensible clothes.
- Make sure you have the equipment you need – Bags, boxes, shovels, brushes, brooms, pans, gloves and grabbers.
- Brief the team – Highlight dangers on the site, give people your guidelines especially around dangerous litter, slopes, hazards and wildlife.

INSURANCE FOR LITTER PICKING

Whether or not your group should take out public liability insurance is a question for the group. Many litter picking groups try to pass responsible and liability to their volunteers as if they are acting alone. In fact some groups, ask their volunteers to sign disclaimers stating that they will not hold the group responsible in the event that they suffer an injury. These disclaimers might have some use in respect of making individuals consider their actions and act responsibly but they are unlikely to hold any weight in law. You cannot discharge the legally bound duty of providing a safe environment from the organising group.

Thus, it is our view that community groups involved in litter picking will need to organise cover for their liability both to the public and to volunteers. Some groups might imagine that the

council would insure these activities but unless the council have organised the event and clearly stated that volunteers are covered under their insurance policy, it is hugely unlikely that the council will be insuring your community event.

However, it is worth checking whether another group can take your volunteer action under their arm. For example a community centre or church might be able to provide cover for the group.

With most insurance policies it is advisable to organise both public liability insurance and employers liability insurance as the majority of insurers (unlike the Health and Safety Executive) consider volunteers to be employees. Some insurers do extend public liability insurance wordings to include volunteers.

At Ladbroke Insurance, we can advise your community group on the most appropriate cover for you and how to get peace of mind, as inexpensively as possible.

A further consideration is the nature of the group. If you are forming to conduct a single litter pick, cover can be organised for a single event. However, it can be more cost effective in some circumstances to organise an annual policy to cover as many events as your group runs in the policy period.

If your group has insurance to cover other activities, for example, if you are a community centre or church, you must inform your insurer about your new activity to ensure you have discharged your obligation of disclosure under your insurance policy.

If you want to discuss insurance for litter picking, contact Ladbroke at www.ladbroke.co.uk or call us on 01909 565858.