

Friends of the Chicago River



#LosetheLitter
#LitterFreeChicagoRiver
@friendsofthechicagoriver

WELCOME TO YOUR LITTER FREE CHICAGO RIVER TOOLKIT

The issue of litter in our rivers is important. Litter is more than just an eyesore, it contaminates drinking water, disrupts recreation, ruins habitat and threatens the lives of all people, wildlife, and communities who depend on clean water.

Friends, with the generous support of the Mars Wrigley Foundation, is campaigning to make the Chicago River system Litter Free. Friends and our partners have hosted many volunteer work days to collect trash and debris along the river. To share what we've learned and to assist you in leading your own volunteer work days, we've created this litter-free volunteer toolkit. Join us in cleaning up your local river; bring the wildlife back, and beautify the area.

Friends of the Chicago River's mission is to improve and protect the Chicago River system for people, plants, and animals.

We've seen corporations, civic organizations, and other community groups all participate in helping the river. As you get out there and host your own volunteer work days, please take photos of before and after to share on social media. It will help us identify where the litter has been found, see if there are "hotspots," identify types of litter (you can complete the rapid trash assessment, included), and demonstrates still more must be done.

PLANNING A VOLUNTEER WORK DAY

By leading a river clean-up effort, you will make your river or stream a safer, healthier place for wildlife and people while providing a fantastic way to connect citizens to their local river or stream. Most people are transformed by a great sense of accomplishment after removing bags of trash and can see the results of helping the environment in a relatively short period of time. Volunteers may also want to know "what else they can do" after the clean-up is over.

This toolkit will hopefully provide guidance and support to individuals, organizations, and anyone interested in conducting a cleanup on the Chicago River. If you are interested in holding a cleanup, Friends can support your efforts by providing gloves, trash bags, assistance with online and print media coverage, and volunteer promotion online. The success of this program depends on dedicated community leaders like you. Thank you for planning a clean-up in your community.



THE FIVE MOST COMMON ITEMS FOUND DURING RIVER CLEANUPS

There is a wide variety of trash found at river cleanups; from shopping carts to sofas, bottles to baby dolls. In no particular order, below are the five most common trash items found at river cleanups.

Source: Chelsea Alley, www.americanrivers.org

1. CIGARETTE BUTTS

Cigarette butts weigh one gram or less, but they account for 30% of all litter in the United States. They are the single worst offender in spite of their small size. More than one trillion cigarettes are discarded each year, weighing over two billion pounds, or the equivalent of 42 Titanics. They accumulate in our soil, on our beaches, and in our rivers.

2. PLASTIC BOTTLES AND BOTTLE CAPS

More than 22 billion plastic water bottles are thrown away yearly, meaning only about one in every six water bottles purchased in the United States ends up being recycled. An average water bottle weighs about 12.7 grams, adding up to over half a billion pounds of wasted plastic each year.

3. FOOD PACKAGING

Food packaging is the largest category of waste in the U.S. It includes food packaging (i.e. milk jugs, juice boxes, and snack packaging) as well as fast food packaging (i.e. paper, Styrofoam, wax wrappings, coffee cups, and drink cups). Almost half of litter in the U.S. is food packaging. While some of these items could be recycled, most are not.

4. PLASTIC BAGS

Plastic bags are very common in the United States. Over 100 billion bags are used each year and most are not recycled. Plastic bags only weigh about eight grams each, but enough are littered annually to weigh as much as 176 adult blue whales. Plastic bags take almost as long to degrade as plastic bottles and leach harmful chemicals into the environment.

5. ALUMINUM CANS

Almost 100 billion aluminum cans are used in the U.S. annually, and only about half of these cans are recycled. The rest go to landfills or into the environment. Beverage containers account for 50% of roadside litter (though this statistic includes plastic containers), and much of that is washed into our waterways, hurting the ecosystem.

Bonus: WHAT KIND OF TRASH WILL STAY IN YOUR RIVER THE LONGEST?

Answer: MICROPLASTICS

Microplastics can come from larger plastic items when they break down, or in the form of products like microbeads. Most microplastics float into the ocean, but many will mix with river sediments. This decreases oxygen levels in the water and harms aquatic animals.

TOOLS FOR CLEANUP ORGANIZERS

GETTING THE WORD OUT ABOUT YOUR CLEANUP

Media attention can be very beneficial to your clean-up, especially if you plan on holding it annually. When working with sponsors and attendees, the lure of media attention might help secure additional donations and sponsors, as well as attendees.

- Customize communications with reporters and bloggers who may cover your event.
- Invite reporters and bloggers to attend your clean-up.
- Follow up after the event with a press release summarizing the day including any photos, especially smiling faces.

Please share photos of your litter cleanups at **#LoseTheLitter**, **#LitterFreeChicagoRiver**, and **@friendsofthechicagoriver**

CLEAN-UP SITE SELECTION

You should consider the number of volunteers and the accessibility of the clean-up location when selecting your site:

- Stay away from areas that have existing or potential safety hazards like unstable banks and busy roads.
- Be sensitive to the ecosystem. Plan a clean-up near existing trails so as not to trample native plants.
- Before making any definite plans, determine whether the land is public or private, and if you'll need permission to host your clean-up. Ensure restroom availability.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

The more people at your event, the greater your impact can be. Volunteers will expect easy access to the clean-up site. Always remember that there are other jobs that do not require significant physical activity. These include handing out supplies, on-site registration, organizing lunch, and volunteer outreach. Encourage everyone, regardless of ability or age, to participate in the manner in which they feel most comfortable.

Prepare your volunteers by letting them know what time to arrive, what to wear, and what they will be doing. In the case of inclement weather, include a rain date or cancellation information, such as a phone number to call before the event begins. Keep track of the methods you've used to invite volunteers to your clean-up. Keep track of how many volunteers responded to the different outreach methods. You can use this information when planning your next river clean-up.



VOLUNTEER RETENTION

On the day of your clean-up you will have a group of volunteers excited about keeping their river safe and clean. Keeping your river clean-up volunteers active and engaged after the clean-up is just as important as getting them there in the first place. Provide your volunteers with an action that they can take at the end of the cleanup. A few action ideas are:

- Have an interest sheet and ask volunteers to sign-up to get more information from you.
- Bring a dry-erase board and ask volunteers to write down why they want clean water on the sign.
- Share your photos with elected officials in the form of a photo collage or on social media to show them that their constituents care about your river.
- Keep an eye out for volunteers at your clean-up who seem especially passionate about or interested in keeping the river clean. Talk to them about other ways they can regularly volunteer or approach them to see if they would be interested in helping to plan your next river clean-up.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Garnering media attention can be very beneficial to your cleanup, especially as you prepare to engage the community. Media attention will help raise awareness as well as draw additional volunteers. As you plan media your outreach campaign, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Invite reporters and bloggers to attend your event.
- Mention any sponsors and/or politicians who may be attending.
- Encourage your attendees to post on their social networks and encourage live posting or tweeting during the event.
- Follow up after the event with statistics on trash removed, a general summary of the day and any photos.
- Inviting elected officials is a great way to draw attention to the river and highlight its importance to your community.

PLAN TO CELEBRATE

Offering lunch during or after your event is a great way to thank your volunteers and build camaraderie. If you choose to include lunch at your event, ask a local restaurant or grocery store to sponsor your clean-up by donating lunch and snacks for participants.

WEATHER PLANS

Be ready in case if inclement weather or other emergencies. Keep a list of all worksite contacts handy.

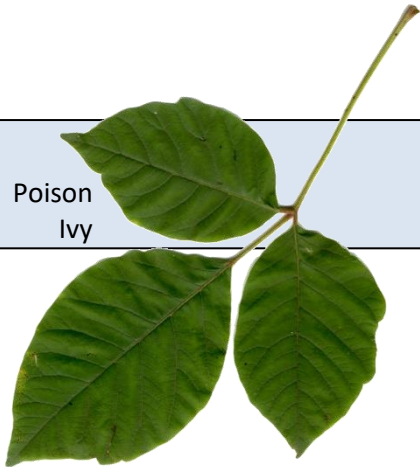
- Fully charge your cell phone the night before. Volunteers, reporters, VIPs and volunteers may need to reach you throughout the day.
- Have a plan to quickly notify all of your volunteers in case of a workday cancellation.
- Keep a list of emergency contacts such as Forest Preserve Police.
- Confirm the location/arrival of food and supplies.
- Confirm the arrival of end-of-workday trash collectors and caterers.



BEING SAFE OUT IN NATURE

- Keep a well-stocked First Aid kit nearby. Let others know where it is kept.
- Be aware of ticks and know how to check for them.
- Know how to identify poison ivy and stinging nettle and don't touch them.

Poison
Ivy



RIVER CLEAN-UP SAFETY

It is important to prepare your volunteers for the hazards they might encounter on the cleanup site. Below you will find tips for on and off the water as well as how to handle various types of materials in your cleanup area. Instruct volunteers that when they are in doubt, they should notify the organizers and/or team leaders instead of handling the materials themselves.

DAY OF THE CLEAN-UP

You'll want to make sure your workday goes smoothly. There are some very simple steps to ensure that it does.

- Be clear about the start time and finish time so your volunteers can plan. Gather everyone together at the start and finish.
- Always have elected officials speak early in the program, and introduce them to speak in order of importance.
- Talk about the importance of the river and helping the environment. Be sure about your mission and goals for the day.
- Identify any team leaders and whom to go in case of emergencies.
- Outline what people should not pick up (leaky batteries, chemical containers, sharp items, etc).
- Go over the schedule for the day, including the location to meet back up at the end of the clean-up and where to place the bagged and loose trash.
- Make sure everyone knows where to focus their efforts and when to stop.
- Thank everyone.

PROTECTIVE GEAR

Protect your group from hazards by encouraging everyone to use work gloves, sturdy shoes with hard soles, long pants or high boots to avoid scratches, sunscreen, insect repellent, and hand sanitizer. Also make sure your volunteers bring snacks, a reusable water bottle, and hand sanitizer.



HANDLING TRASH

Garbage can be dirty, rusty, slimy, and sometimes sharp. Use caution when handling trash to avoid cuts and abrasions. Use a picker if they are available. Emphasize to everyone: Don't be afraid to ask for help; don't try to lift heavy objects alone.



WASTE DISPOSAL GUIDANCE

Volunteers can find a lot of crazy things in the river. If you discover hazardous materials contact your state's Department of Environmental Management, pollution control or like agency. Do not attempt to handle hazardous materials on your own. Call professionals if you encounter any of the following:

Oil-based paints	Used motor oil	Paint thinners	Drain cleaners	Antifreeze
Lawn chemicals	Insecticides	Solvents	Pesticides	Herbicides
Old gasoline	Hobby chemicals	Pool chemicals	Cleaning products	Fluorescent bulbs
Household batteries	Agricultural chemicals	Propane tanks	Smoke detectors	Mercury
Explosives	Fireworks	Farm machinery oil	Fire extinguishers	Aerosol paints
Lead-acid batteries	Controlled substances	Old and outdated medicines	Sharps, needles and potentially infectious medical wastes	

WRAP UP AND CELEBRATE

After your volunteers have collected all the waste and brought it to the designated area, separate the trash and recycling. Gather your volunteers and take a few pictures to document all your hard work (share your group's photos via Instagram at @friendsofthechicagoriver). Picnic celebrations are the perfect opportunity to thank your volunteers. Share your estimated data with them so they have immediate results of their hard work to take home with them.

Rapid Trash Assessment

HOW TO DO A RAPID TRASH ASSESSMENT

Assign Group Member Roles:

- ◆ High Water Line Person (this person searches for trash, and picks it up)
- ◆ Low Water Line/ Stream Bed Person (this person searches for trash, and picks it up)
- ◆ Recorder (this person will hold the surveys, and document trash the others find it)

Do the Assessments:

- ◆ Do the “Rapid Trash Assessment Scoring” and document your results, Circle your site’s rating 0-3.
- ◆ Do the “Trash Tally” and document your results. Make sure to look under plants and rocks.
- ◆ Analyze & Interpret Your Data with your group.
- ◆ Compare Results with other sites, or compare to see if there is change over time.

Pick up the trash:

- ◆ Avoid: hazardous waste, or unidentifiable waste.
- ◆ If there are strong currents or waves, do your assessment from a safe distance

Rapid Trash Assessment Scoring

Rating System:	Optimal (score: 3)	Sub-optimal (score: 2)	Marginal (score: 1)	Poor (score: 0)
Level of Trash On first glance of the area I see...	No visible trash.	Little trash visible.	Trash is evident at first glance.	Trash distracts the eye.
Trash that is a threat to Aquatic Life (things that are toxic, items that can float and be mistaken for food)	Observable trash is mostly paper or wood products or other biodegradable materials.	Little or no trash. Some persistent, buoyant, small litter or debris.	Medium prevalence of litter that is plastic.	Large amount of toxic materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pesticides • batteries • medical waste • cigarette butts
Trash that is a threat to Humans (toxic chemicals, things with bacteria, viruses, sharp edges, and long-standing water)	Observable trash contains no evidence of a direct threat to humans.	Trash contains sharp objects that might puncture someone: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broken glass • metal debris Trash contains standing water where mosquitoes can reproduce (i.e. inside a tire or bucket).	Presence of standing water and/or one of these hazards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hypodermic needles • medical waste • diapers • pet/human feces • pesticides • batteries • light bulbs 	Presence of more than one of these hazards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hypodermic needles • medical waste • diapers • pet/human feces • pesticides • batteries • light bulbs
Trash that has been Dumped (these items were brought and left behind)	5 items or less of litter that was carried downstream from another location.	Some evidence of littering on site.	Litter is in the water and along the shore, and includes a large item that had to have been driven there.	Significant litter on shore or in the water. Evidence of chronic dumping, and more than one large item.
Trash that has Accumulated (has been brought from elsewhere by water or wind - silt marks, faded, or decomposing)	No trash has been transported by water. If there is trash it appears to be directly deposited.	Less than 5 pieces of trash have evidence that they have been transported there by water.	5 to 20 items of trash are carried to the location by water. Often these are found at high water mark.	More than 20 items have been carried to the area by water.

Submit your findings to friends@chicagoriver.org

Trash Tally – Data Collection

Name: _____

Location: _____ Date: _____

As you go along, tally up the number of items that you find in each category.

Collect any trash that does not pose a risk to you.

Plastic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plastic Bags • Bottle Caps • Cup Lid/Straws • Thin Wrappers • Hard Plastic Packaging • Styrofoam (Polystyrene) • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:	Biodegradable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper • Cardboard • Yard Waste • Leaf-litter Piles • Landscaping Waste • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:	Biohazard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Waste • Medical Waste • Syringes or Pipettes • Dead Animals • Pesticides/Herbicides • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:	Metal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottle Caps • Aluminum Foil • Aluminum or Steel Cans • Metal Pipe Segments • Pots and Pans • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:
Glass <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glass Bottles • Broken Glass • Dishes • Mirrors • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:	Large Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appliances • Tires • Bags of Trash • Shopping Carts • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:	Construction Debris <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete Blocks • Rebar • Bricks • Wood Debris • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:	Fabric and Cloth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthetic Fabric • Natural Fabric • Carpeting • Other (write-in) _____ Tally:
All other items			

Analyze Your Data (...and share it with Friends of the Chicago River)

Rapid Trash Assessment	Score (0-3)
Level of Trash	
Threat to Aquatic Life	
Threat to Human Life	
Trash That Has Been Dumped	
Trash That Has Accumulated	
Total:	
Average:	

*You could also compare weight or volume of the items for comparison.

Trash Tally	# of items found*
Plastic	
Biodegradable	
Biohazards	
Metal	
Glass	
Large Items	
Construction Debris	
Fabric and Cloth	
Total:	

Submit your findings to friends@chicagoriver.org

RIVER CLEAN-UP LIABILITY WAIVER

I, the undersigned, being the volunteer involved in the river cleanup project (hereinafter referred to as the “Project”) or being the parent or legal guardian of such a volunteer in the Project, in consideration of my or another’s participation in the Project, I hereby, for myself and any volunteer for who I am a parent or legal guardian release, discharge, hold harmless, and forever acquit (_____) [your name/organization] the program, or other local sponsors, and their officers, agents, representatives and employees from any and all actions, causes of action, claims or any liabilities whatsoever, known or unknown now existing or which may arise in the future, on account of or in any way related to or arising out of participation in the Project. Further, I assume all liability of any non-participants who accompany me.

Date _____

Participant’s name (please print) _____

Participant’s signature _____

Participant’s age _____

Signature of participant’s parent
or legal guardian _____

You must sign the liability waiver to participate.

☐ I AGREE TO THE PHOTO / VIDEO RELEASE – By checking this release, I grant and convey to (_____) [your name/organization] and their successors, and assigns and anyone authorized by any of them, the irrevocable and unrestricted right to use and publish any and all photographic or digital images and video, audio or other recordings (in any medium) of me, my likeness or voice made in connection with my volunteer participation.

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