



# GREEN FINS CLEANUP GUIDELINES

Conducting an environmentally friendly coastal or  
underwater cleanup

# FOREWORD

*Reef-World, the team behind Green Fins, has created these guidelines to help Green Fins members and other marine tourism operators conduct beach and underwater cleanups in an environmentally friendly way. They also outline how to provide education on marine debris issues during your cleanup event.*

*Trash in our oceans is a serious problem that threatens the marine environment and dependent livelihoods. Around 80% of marine trash comes from land-based sources. Although it is an entirely man-made problem, it is also entirely preventable. As well as refusing single-use items, reducing your waste, reusing items and recycling trash, you can make a difference by taking part in, or running, beach and underwater cleanup events. These cleanup events reduce the waste in the ocean and help raise community awareness about the issue of marine debris. Plus, recording and submitting data on the trash you collect can influence long-term solutions and decision making.*

*If you've been inspired to organise a beach or underwater cleanup, please refer to these guidelines to ensure you and your team are protecting the ocean by following environmental best practice. This guidance will help ensure you don't cause any further damage to marine ecosystems while removing marine debris. There are three sections which outline key things you should consider before, during and after the cleanup. Please make sure any participants are fully briefed on the following information before you begin your beach clean or cleanup dive.*

*Thank you for becoming part of the solution and organising a cleanup: every event will make a difference, however big or small!*



Coral Reef Image Bank/ Erik Lukas

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# BEFORE THE CLEAN UP

## Choose a location

Identify the area you want to clean (e.g. beach, river watershed or urban area). Make sure it is safe, accessible and that you're allowed to be there. Identify possible hazards such as busy roads, power lines, rocky/slippery areas or high tides and overcome these by changing location or fully preparing your participants with a thorough briefing. Identify where you will have your assembly point, trash collection point and your first aid station.



### **TIP: For larger events**

If the location is hard to find, you could print posters or flyers with a map showing your volunteers where to go.

### **TIP: Include your local government if you can**

In some places, you may need permissions from the local government. If not, it's worth inviting them to take part to help you build that relationship and for them to see the issues first-hand.

## Plan the event

Timing: Check the tides and organise your beach clean up at low tide, or your underwater clean up when there are milder currents or slack tide.



**TIP:** Many communities prefer to do beach cleanups in the early morning before the full heat of the sun.

Layout: If you're hosting a larger event, you might need to plan the layout in advance. Think about the meeting point for volunteers on arrival, where they should register and pick up garbage bags to fill, where the pre-event briefing will take place and where trash and completed data forms will be collected from volunteers.

There are various other questions you might need to consider when planning the event layout:

- Will you have a refreshment station or will you ask guests to bring their own drinks and snacks?
- Do you need to provide data sheets or inform guests to download an App to collect data?
- Will you be hosting educational games and, if so, where will these take place?
- Is there a sheltered area where volunteers could rest in case of rain or intense sun?
- Do you need to provide a first aid station?
- Who is your certified first aider?

Also, be sure to plan an assembly point in case of emergency and let volunteers know where this is during their briefing.

## Decide on your data collection method

The data your volunteers collect during your cleanup can be used to influence long-term solutions for reducing global ocean trash. If possible, prepare some data collection guidelines before the event so you can ensure your volunteers are fully briefed during a pre-cleanup briefing.



**TIP:** If you have the option, submitting your data digitally (through an app or website) is a great way to reduce paper usage.

Download Ocean Conservancy's [Clean Swell app](#) and [this poster](#) to clearly explain to guests how to use the app to **record and submit their data**.

Download Project AWARE's Dive Against Debris® app (from [Google Play](#) or [App Store](#)) and find all the information you'll need to record and submit your data in the [Dive Against Debris® Survey Toolkit](#).

## Decide how many volunteers you will need to clean the site

Each trash collection team should have:

- One data recorder - to record what trash is collected as outlined in the data collection section above
- Two people to hold the garbage bag
- At least one other person to collect trash and report it to the data collector as they place it in the garbage bag.

**For larger events:** Think about whether you need to assign roles to the core team of organisers and who will be manning any stations you plan to set up. You may want to provide each core team member with a checklist of his or her responsibilities.



**TIP:** You could also consider assigning a Team Captain to each team of trash collectors. This person will be responsible for ensuring all trash is weighed and returned to the right place and that data forms are completed and returned to the event organiser.

You should also decide whether you want to provide prizes for the volunteers that collect the most trash as a way of encouraging participation. If you do this, be sure to promote the competition and prize in advance to entice people to attend and take part. Identify the winners by recording the weight of each volunteer's trash at the collection point - and don't forget to remind people they must register on arrival to be in with a chance of winning. This will give you the opportunity to give them your pre-event briefing and any guidelines or essential materials.

## Arrange to have trash removed responsibly

Once you've collected the trash, you'll need to ensure it can be removed and disposed of responsibly. Here are a few points you might want to think about:

- How will you dispose of the trash collected?
- Which items can you arrange to be recycled?
- How will your volunteers keep these recyclable items separate from the other trash?
- Can you arrange collection via garbage trucks?
- Is there a recycling system in your area?
- Will your local government help?

## Promote your event

Contact everyone you want to take part: you could do this in person, via email, by advertising the event on social media or by designing and displaying posters (with the event's date, time and location) in a location where they will be seen by as many members of the local community as possible. For example, in shops, supermarkets, dive centres, schools, restaurants etc. Use the opportunity of putting up posters or handing out flyers to promote the event to members of the public face-to-face and encourage people to come.

You might need to send out several reminders in different formats. Remember: busy professionals might not read e-mails and that community members are best engaged through face-to-face contact or posters.

If you're a dive or snorkel operator, you can help boost numbers by making it compulsory for all staff to participate and encourage your guests, other local businesses and community members to join in too.

When promoting your event, be sure to let volunteers know if they will need to wear or bring anything e.g. gloves (not single-use!), proper shoes, sun protection, reusable water bottles or garbage bags for collecting the trash.

**For larger events:** Enlisting the help of local governments or organisations can greatly increase the community engagement of your event as well as inspiring and empowering people to make a lasting change to their waste management. Think about who are the key local leaders who might be able to help you gather groups of people quickly and the best way to communicate with them. Sometimes visiting people directly to ask for their help is much more effective than sending a blanket email.

## Gather your equipment

Make sure you are fully prepared before the cleanup begins with everything you will need. Depending on your plan, this might include:

- Pens/pencils and paper
- Volunteer registration forms
- Ocean Conservancy data forms (available [here](#))
  - Or download the [Clean Swell app](#) or Dive Against Debris® app ([Google Play/App Store](#))
- Data collection guidelines for your volunteers (if you have them)
- Clipboards
- Gloves (or ask volunteers to bring their own). Please avoid using single-use gloves
- Garbage bags e.g. rice sacks, cement bags or black sacks
- Cutters, scissors, trowels (to remove trapped items)
- Scales (to weigh your total trash collected)
- A clearly labelled hazardous waste container e.g. empty liquid detergent bottle with lid (for sharp materials such as cut glass/needles)
- Drinking water (encourage your volunteers to bring their own reusable water bottles that you can refill)
- Snacks (no disposable or single-use items)
- Cameras (to document the event)
- First aid kit and certified first aider



**TIP:** Sometimes guests will want to bring their own snacks or equipment. Please make sure they do not bring items that will add to the litter problem as this will be counter productive to your cleanup. Make sure guests do not bring: mineral water or drinks in single-use plastic bottles, snacks in single-use wrappers and do not smoke cigarettes during the cleanup.



# DURING THE CLEAN UP

## Set up

Event organisers should arrive early to make sure everything is properly set up ahead of the cleanup. Depending on the size of your event, you might need to:

- Set up and clearly label the different stations
- Post signs directing people to the registration desk
- Make sure your core team is comfortable with its responsibilities

## Brief participants

Provide volunteers with an event itinerary which covers the following points:

- Where and when to register
- When they should be collecting trash & recording data
- Where they should weigh the trash collected
- Where and when to return completed data forms to the event organiser
- Where to find refreshments
- Where and when prize givings will be held (if you are hosting any competitions)
- Where and when the final thank you and group photo will take place
- Where and how trash will be removed from site



**TIP:** As some people may arrive late, make sure you have a clear process for everyone to check in and receive all relevant briefings and information before they join the cleanup.

Make sure your volunteers have all the equipment and materials they will need for the cleanup e.g. data forms, garbage bags and gloves. If you're asking your volunteers to complete data forms, be sure to explain how they should fill these in.

Explain where the trash should be weighed and left for collection and how to complete the data forms. Where recycling is available, explain which items are recyclable and how to keep them separate from the rest of the trash. Be sure to let your volunteers know of the assembly point and procedures they should follow in case of emergency.



During the briefing, tell volunteers any essential information, including your cleanup dos and don'ts:

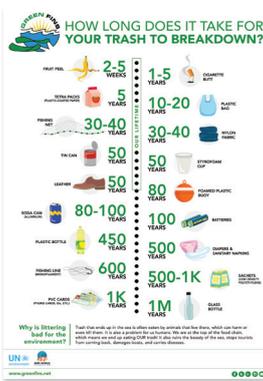
- ✓ Do collect non-biodegradable items e.g. plastic, bricks, glass, metal, rubber or polystyrene
- ✓ Do collect small items e.g. polystyrene balls or sweet wrappers
- ✓ Do collect data on the provided data forms
- ✓ Do work together
- ✓ Do report back to the weighing station to weigh your collected trash and return your completed data forms to the organiser
- ✓ Do deposit collected trash in the allocated place
- ✓ Do ensure trash is collected and properly disposed of
- ✗ Don't collect biodegradable items e.g. driftwood, coconuts, seeds, seaweed, coral, shells or other vegetation
- ✗ Don't burn any trash you collect
- ✗ Don't trample vegetation
- ✗ Don't leave any waste from the event itself

## Provide educational content

A cleanup event is a great opportunity to raise awareness within the community. You can inform people what marine debris is, what negative effect it has upon the environment and how to prevent it.

Depending on the size and nature of your event, there are a few different ways you might like to do this:

- Ask your core team to talk to your volunteers about environmental facts as they collect trash
- Play interactive games that teach members of the public about the environment
- Display educational posters around the site - you could use some of the [Green Fins materials \(www.greenfins.net/action-centre\)](http://www.greenfins.net/action-centre) or create your own



## Document the event

It can be helpful to document the success of your cleanup: take before and after photos of the site as well as taking photos during the event. Make sure all collected trash has been weighed and recorded and all data forms have been correctly filled out and returned to the organiser.

The event organiser should also ensure all trash and recycling is removed from the site and properly disposed of. Take extra care that you do not leave any waste from the event itself!

**TIP FOR GREEN FINS MEMBERS:** Keep a log of your cleanups to show your assessor during your next assessment and have it count towards your assessment score.



## Underwater cleanups

Before you start your underwater cleanup, brief all participants on the maximum dive time to make sure no-one is left behind.

If you're taking part in an underwater cleanup, there are certain additional points you'll need to consider to ensure you avoid damaging the fragile marine ecosystem while conducting your cleanup. Please be sure to ensure all participants are thoroughly briefed on the following information before you go diving:

**Maintain good neutral buoyancy throughout the dive:** it's important to keep good neutral buoyancy during any dive. However, be aware your buoyancy will change during a cleanup dive because as you collect more trash your rubbish bag will become heavier. So, make sure you're adjusting your buoyancy to stay clear of the reef throughout the dive.

**Watch your fins:** watching your fins so you don't contact the reef or stir up any sediment is just as important - if not more so - during a cleanup than a normal dive. Although your attention will be focused on finding and collecting rubbish on the dive site, please make sure you're still aware of all your equipment, especially your fins, throughout the dive.

**Touch only trash:** be careful not to touch, move or manipulate marine life in your attempt to collect any litter.

**Ensure equipment is attached, streamlined and gauges are tucked in:** if your equipment is dangling, you risk making damaging contact with the reef. Please make sure everything is tucked in and fully secure.

**Assess the environment before beginning removal:** heavy swell or currents will make avoiding environmental damage during collection very difficult. So, it's important to assess the environment before you begin your cleanup to ensure conditions are suitable. If the current is too strong or there's too much surge, it's best to postpone your underwater cleanup until conditions are better.

**Hold your trash bag so that nothing trails or touches the bottom:** make sure you're not damaging the marine environment by allowing your rubbish bag to touch or drag along the bottom. Ensure you're carrying the bag clear of the reef and nothing is trailing or dragging.

**Dive in a head down position:** this will help you avoid stirring the sediment or contacting the bottom with your fins.

**Work slowly and carefully in buddy teams:** during your underwater cleanup, work in buddy teams and allocate each diver a specific role. One person should wear gloves and collect the trash while the other diver should hold the rubbish bag. Work slowly and carefully and be careful not to touch, knock or damage the reef during your collection.

**Avoid removing items that cannot easily be lifted:** during your cleanup you might find heavy items such as tyres or car batteries. If items are too large or heavy to be easily lifted, please leave them where you found them - trying to remove them could cause even more damage. Never use your BCD to try to lift heavy items.

### **Use appropriate equipment**

In addition to your standard scuba gear you will need:

- Mesh bags for collecting trash
- Gloves (which should only be used on cleanup dives for protection from trash and sharp objects)
- Scissors or shears for cutting items such as fishing line or tin cans. Scissors are preferred to dive knives for these tasks.

### **What to remove**

Marine animals easily confuse items such as plastic bags with their normal food source and can, consequently, suffocate. Please remove all non-biodegradable items, such as those listed below:

- All plastic (e.g. plastic bags, food wrappers, bottles, bottle caps, containers, 6-pack rings)
- Clothing
- Bags and rice sacks
- Fishing gear (e.g. line, nets or broken fish traps). Never try to pull fishing line free. Instead, cut and remove it in sections to avoid damaging any organisms growing around it. Use scissors or shears, rather than a knife, and wind the line around an object to control it.
- Batteries
- Glass bottles
- Tin cans
- Cigarette butts
- Tyres (if small and light enough to remove)

### **What to leave**

Make sure you check all trash before removal as there will be some instances where you should leave things where they were found. Do not remove any items that contain marine life or that have already become incorporated into the environment and are supporting life in any way. Cut tin cans open to make sure there is nothing living inside. Please leave:

- Glass bottles covered in a lot of growth
- Sand and silt contained inside cups or cans (hold these close to sandy parts of the seabed and shake out the contents carefully)
- Anything stuck or encrusted with growth
- Anything, no matter how ugly, that has become overgrown with marine life
- Anything that may be dangerous or cause injury
- Heavy items (never use your BCD to lift heavy objects)
- Metal drums or containers that may contain hazardous materials



# AFTER THE CLEAN UP

## Say thank you!

Have a short thank you ceremony to acknowledge participants and take a final group photo to celebrate everyone's hard work.

## Report your data

Reporting what you collected is an important part of your beach clean event. Estimate the distance you cleaned, weigh the total amount of trash collected and report your data to the appropriate organisations - for example, submitting your data via the Clean Swell or Dive Against Debris® apps.

## Share your results

Encourage the people who took part to share their experiences with you - this might be in the form of photos, social media posts or fun stories. You can use these to spread the word in person and on social media by telling people about your good work and encouraging them to do the same.



**TOP TIP FOR GREEN FINS MEMBERS:** tag Green Fins on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) so your pictures can be shared with the rest of the Green Fins network.

 @GreenFins   @Green\_Fins



**Thank you for helping to protect the marine environment - and avoid causing further damage to the reef - by following these simple guidelines during your cleanups.**

This guide was based on information from the [Ocean Conservancy's Trash Free Seas DIY Cleanup Tool Kit](#)



**THE REEF-WORLD**  
FOUNDATION



INTERNATIONAL  
COORDINATOR

Contact information:

The Reef-World Foundation leads the global implementation of the UN Environment Programme's Green Fins initiative, which focuses on driving environmentally friendly scuba diving and snorkelling practices across the industry globally

Please visit [www.reef-world.org](http://www.reef-world.org) and [www.greenfins.net](http://www.greenfins.net) or follow us on social media:   @GreenFins   @Green\_Fins

Contact the Green Fins teams on [info@greenfins.net](mailto:info@greenfins.net)

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