

Guide to Organising a Community Clean Up

Introduction

A community clean up is a great way to show that your group cares about your local environment, while actively encouraging people not to drop litter and to take pride in where they live.

This online booklet gives you advice on how to organise a community clean up event, what safe working practices you should be aware of, how to get people involved and how to maximise publicity for your event.

We're here to help

Thurrock Council can help you with your community clean up by lending you the necessary litter picking equipment, collection sacks (refuse and recycling), gloves, arranging for the collected litter to be removed and providing help and advice where needed.

The Council may be able to provide a 'free' collection service to those who volunteer to collect discarded litter from public areas such as pavements, footpaths and walkways.

Please only collect litter from publically used areas, such as pavements, footpaths and walkways.

Please do not collect litter from any land which is not in everyday use by the general public.

If you are unsure as to litter pick an area or not, please contact the Council before proceeding with the clean up as we will not collect litter or refuse gathered from private land.

If an area of private land has a lot of litter on it, please advise the Council and we will contact the landowner in order to resolve the problem.

We would ask that you email the Waste and Recycling Education Officer at waste@thurrock.gov.uk set up the collection of litter pickers and bags and also to arrange a central collection point and time for the refuse to be collected.

We would ask that the litter is collected in refuse sacks and that the bags are easy to lift as the collection crews will have to lift the bags over waist height to get them onto the collection vehicle.

The collection crew will be unable to collect large items of household furniture, sofas, mattresses, white goods or items such as tyres or gas bottles. We would ask you to report such items or large amounts of litter/refuse or fly-tipping at 01375 652652 and an investigation will be carried out by the Environmental Enforcement team with regard to affecting the removal of the items.

Planning your Clean Up

Firstly decide on what you want to achieve with a community clean up. Do you want to clean up a local landmark or tackle a 'grot spot'? It is a good idea to identify some goals that the clean up aims to achieve.

Always get permission from the landowner for your clean up activity. The landowner could be the council or perhaps a farmer or local estate owner.

The Council will not however collect litter or refuse gathered from private land. If you litter pick an area of private land, please ensure you have arranged for a private collection of the litter with the land owner.

The council does not hold the details of land ownership. However you can contact the land registry on 01305 363636 or via www.landreg.gov.uk for more information.

Remember to ask for permission well in advance of the event as the process for approval may take some time.

Some points to consider

- How will you carry out your clean up, will it be a straight forward litter pick or a larger event tackling other issues besides litter?
- Should refreshments or lunch be provided?
- Is there a suitable rally point for the day, familiar to everyone, from where you can start and finish the event?
- How will you get rid of the waste at the end of the event?
- Thurrock Council may be able to help with the disposal arrangements (please see above), or alternatively the waste can be taken to the local tip.

Risk Assessment

Having chosen your site or sites where you want to carry out your clean up, you should visit the areas to carry out a risk assessment. This is careful examination of the possible harms and dangers that your volunteers might encounter when carrying out the clean up, for example;

- Unlabelled and unmarked cans and canisters, oil drums, poisons, insecticides, broken glass, syringes, condoms etc.
- Slips, trips and falls, especially around water, steep banks, muddy holes.
- Roads, with heavy traffic, or waterways with deep or fast flowing water.

If an area carries too many risks for you and your team leave the clearing of the site to the local authorities and choose another location. A risk assessment form and guidance notes are available from the Council to help you successfully plan your event

Enlist help

Consider targeting local companies and organisations which may be able to help support the event by providing materials, services or a donation.

For example a supermarket or grocery may be able to provide you with refreshments or donate bin bags.

When drumming up support and volunteers for your clean up you may want to look to other organisations who would be interested in making an impact on the local environment, such as schools, scouts, environmental groups or churches. It is a good idea to try and involve as much of the local community as possible, and this can be done by;

Approaching local residents through leafleting, a residents' group or parish newsletter.

Put up posters in local shops, supermarkets, libraries, community schools, and on church and village notice boards

Tell the local media by sending them a press release calling for volunteers well in advance of the event with details of who to contact and how people can get involved.

Equipment

- The equipment required for the clean up can depend on the nature, size and type of your event and the resources available to you. Generally, the following items will be necessary;
- Clean up equipment; such as refuse sacks, litter pickers, gloves, wheelbarrows, rakes and shovels.
- Safe containers; ensure you have a suitable container for broken glass or sharp materials which could rip plastic bags.
- First Aid; ensure you have a trained first-aider on site with the appropriate equipment. Let your volunteers know who the first-aider is and where they can be found during the event. For larger events you may consider asking organisations such as St John Ambulance to provide assistance.
- If you are likely to come across hypodermic needles or drug related litter, please leave these items where they are and call our Contact Centre phone number (01375 652652) and ask for them to be collected. Please give a full and clear description of where they are located to ensure that collection can be completed efficiently and effectively.
- Rubbish removal; have available a skip or other means of removal for the rubbish you have collected.
- Means of communication; make sure you can stay in contact with your volunteers, through the use of mobile phones with easy access to contact numbers.

- Specialist help; arrange for specialist help from the Fire Brigade, Police, the Council or a professional company when dealing with abandoned vehicles or heavy objects.
- Protective clothing and equipment; your risk assessment will help you decide what safety equipment you need such as heavy duty gloves and high visibility clothing.
- The Council may be able to provide some of this equipment, or try the Yellow Pages for local companies.

Unfortunately, due the number of litter pickers not being returned by volunteers we will now have to charge for any pickers that are not returned to the Council. We will send an invoice to the organisers of the clean up in this regard. To prevent this course of action, please ensure that all volunteers return the litter pickers so they can be loaned out to the next community group.

Keep It Safe

Make sure everyone is aware of the potential dangers, such as items they should not be picking up, as identified in your risk assessment.

If you are involving local children, make sure there is a sufficient number of adults to supervise.

Before the clean up make sure the children understand which items are potentially dangerous and should not be picked up. Be aware that some children may not heed your warnings and therefore must be closely supervised, don't let children attempt to pick up heavy or bulky items.

With children try to do no more than an hour cleanup, if only adults are involved, attempt only what is within everyone's capacity and allow for rest breaks.

Be Considerate

If you are working on parks, in the country, in open spaces or in woodland, avoid disturbing animals and plants, particularly during nesting season.

Keep gates closed and avoid clearing natural 'rubbish' like stones, logs and weeds, they may look untidy but they may be home to animals and birds.

Before the clean up you may wish to seek advice from the Essex Biodiversity Project Tel: (01621) 862960 or contact the Wildlife Trust.

Insurance Cover

Obtaining public liability insurance is very important and not very expensive. This will provide cover for your legal liability arising from accidental damage or injury that occurs during the event, including damage or injury to a member of the public or their property.

If you represent an organisation or school it is possible that you already have insurance in place, but it is important to check that clean ups are covered under such insurance.

Media coverage for your event

Media coverage will help maximise awareness of the event and enlist volunteers.

Contact the news desk of your local paper or radio station at least a week before your event to let them know what's happening.

Provide the media with an interesting angle, which will help to ensure coverage for your event, and include the following information in a press release;

- Who is taking part, you might want to invite local councillors or Dignitaries
- When your event is taking place
- Where you are cleaning up
- Why you chose that particular area, and what you want to achieve from the event
- What is interesting, unusual, or unique about your event
- How you are going to do the clean up

It's a good idea to also contact them the day before to remind them of your event and hold a photo call on the day of the event.

Photo calls in the morning are preferable so deadlines can be met for the evening newspaper or broadcasts.

Don't be disheartened if the media do not cover your story, on the day other news events may take precedence over yours. Just ensure that your volunteers have a fun day, and that they know their efforts are appreciated. View any media coverage as a bonus.