

Guidance for litter picking volunteers

Introduction

Individuals and groups acting as litter picking volunteers can be exposed to several easily avoidable hazards. This guidance has been produced to help volunteers identify these hazards, making their involvement safe and enjoyable, and should be followed by all volunteers.

To contact us about any of the items raised in this guidance, please call 01992 564000 or email wastemanagement@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Protective clothing and equipment

Volunteers undertaking litter picks should always use the following items:

- reflective hi-visibility waistcoats to clearly highlight volunteers to traffic and pedestrians (those provided are only appropriate for areas where the speed limit is 30mph or less)
- Volunteers to avoid direct contact with litter and repetitive bending by using litterpickers
- gloves to minimise contact with any noxious or dangerous materials
- suitable footwear/clothing (flip flops or another open-toe footwear is not recommended)

Noxious and dangerous materials, the following materials may be encountered during litter picks and should be treated with caution:

- broken glass – remove using a litter picker or a brush and shovel, avoiding contact by hand, and dispose of in a sturdy container
- drug related litter/hypodermics – these should not be moved. Note the location and report it to Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) for specialist removal
- suspect materials and fly tipping – items that are possibly dangerous, such as unknown liquids in containers, building materials or asbestos, should not be moved by volunteers. Note the location and report it to EFDC for specialist removal.

If there is any doubt about an item, leave it and let EFDC know (only items on publicly accessible land).

Location

We can only collect litter that has been picked from Epping Forest District Council or Essex County Council adopted highway.

When requesting support for your litter pick you will need to provide details of where you will be litter picking so we can check landownership details.

General site safety and inspection

Litter picking of areas beside roads should be carried out with extreme caution, due to the risk of being struck by vehicles. A pre-site inspection should determine an agreed safe

working area. Litter picking should be restricted to only where there are wide verges or pavements, suitable for pedestrians, and should be carried out facing oncoming traffic. It is essential that volunteers are visible to road users. For that reason, hi-visibility waistcoats must be worn, and litter picks should only take place in clear daylight. Volunteers should not attempt to clear litter from the carriageway.

Avoid reaching into hedges or undergrowth in such a way as to expose the face, eyes and skin to scratches from thorns or branches. If an item of litter cannot be safely reached with a litter picker, leave it and report its location to EFDC.

Avoid working close to rivers or on steep slopes, as there is an increased risk of slips and falls. When working close to ditches, avoid reaching into the ditch to remove litter, unless it can be safely reached with a litter picker.

Be mindful of wildlife. In the springtime, avoid disturbing animals and birds that may be nesting and, in the summertime, be wary of wasp and bee nests. Do not enter an area, or attempt to litter pick an area, where works are restricted, are already taking place (for example roadworks) or where the public do not have a right to entry.

The level of risk will vary at each location so, prior to commencing a litter pick, it is recommended that a visual site inspection and risk assessment be carried out to establish the above risks and to identify and note other possible hazards. Volunteers have a duty towards themselves, fellow volunteers and the public to work safely. If there is any doubt about the safety of a site or material, it should be avoided. A dynamic 'on the spot' assessment can take place for any new or changing risks which occur.

Lifting and handling materials

Volunteers should be aware of the risk of injury from carrying bags of collected litter and attempting to lift and carry heavy materials. To avoid injury, the following basic principles of manual handling should be applied:

- Use litter pickers to prevent constant bending and stretching.
- Make sure an item is safe to handle with no sharp edges or noxious contents.
- Decide whether an item can be safely moved either by one or two people.
- Only try to move an item if this can be done without straining.
- When lifting an item, bend the legs and keep the back straight. Young volunteers, while it is beneficial to get young people involved in litter picks, age plays a big part in the ability to recognise and avoid risk. Accordingly, a parent/guardian should supervise those taking part under the age of 18. If a parent/guardian is not taking part with them, the parent/guardian will need to nominate an adult to supervise their children and give their permission for the children to take part.

Collection and disposal of litter

Where larger quantities of litter are being collected, we can arrange for the litter collected to be disposed of after the event. Please use the application form.

Recycling

Volunteers are not expected to separate recyclable items of litter but, if they are willing to do so, it would be welcomed. The recyclable items should be placed in blue recycling bags (where clean and acceptable) or taken to their nearest recycling point.

Disclaimer

Volunteers should not participate in litter picks unless they understand and accept that participation is entirely at their own risk. Volunteers are not working for, or on behalf of, a local authority; therefore, we will not be held responsible for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused because of the actions and omissions of volunteers or this guidance.

Public liability insurance

Obtaining public liability insurance is very important and strongly recommended. This will provide cover for your legal liability arising from accidental damage or injury that may occur during the event, including damage or injury to a member of the public or their property. If you are an individual organising a tidy up, your current household insurance may cover you for public liability. You will need to check your policy to ensure you are covered. If not, you will need to take out a separate public liability insurance.

If you are having difficulty obtaining public liability insurance contact: The Conservation Volunteers (CTV) at www.tcv.org.uk as they can provide groups with insurance, or Ladbrook Insurance at www.ladbrook.co.uk.

An individual organising a clean up may be covered by their household insurance but you need to check the policy.