

ORGANIZE OR PARTICIPATE IN A RIVER CLEANUP

Non-point source pollution is pollution that can't be traced back to a specific location and is the greatest threat to our waterways today. Organizing or participating in a river cleanup with your group, neighbors, friends or family can help protect the health of water by preventing pollution from many sources such as land runoff, precipitation and more. You can also join the Adopt a River program through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. If there isn't a river near you, a stream or lake cleanup also works.

Outcome

Organize or participate a river clean-up to keep polluting trash out of water.

Audience

Youth (ages 5+), adults

Time

1 - 3 hours

Concepts

- Gather neighbors, friends or family to clean-up a section of a river.
- Pick up trash around a river, lake, stream, or wetland.
- Encourage participants to reduce waste to improve water quality.

Supplies

- Trash bags
- Gloves
- Scale (*optional*)



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Preparation

- Set a date, time and location for the river cleanup. Check with city or watershed to see if you need permission to hold a river cleanup or if they have resources available to assist in a river cleanup.
- Freshwater Society offers resources for planning a community cleanup. Find out more at www.freshwater.org/community-clean-ups-for-water-quality. You can also visit the Adopt a River program website for additional

planning assistance. The Adopt a River program through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources helps groups select a site, provides a How-to kit for organizing a cleanup, and supplies including free bags and gloves. Volunteers are required to commit to conducting an annual cleanup for two consecutive years. For more information, visit www.dnr.state.mn.us/adoptriver/index.html.

Procedure

- After you pick a date, time and location for the river cleanup, coordinate with your group, neighbors, family or friends by inviting them to attend.
- On the day of the cleanup, bring trash bags and gloves to the site.
- Before you go out to pick up trash, discuss why keeping pollutants out of water sources is important. Ask the group why water is important to them and what motivated them to participate in the cleanup.
- Divide the participants into smaller groups if the area is large to cover more ground.
- Consider making the cleanup a contest between smaller groups. Whoever collects the most trash or the weirdest item wins!
- If you have a scale, consider weighing the trash collected after the cleanup. Then you can tell others how many pounds of trash you collected to help keep pollutants out of water resources.

Discussion questions

- What did you learn from organizing or participating in the river cleanup?
- How did you feel after cleaning up the river (or stream or lake)?
- What was challenging about the river cleanup? What was rewarding?
- How can cleaning up the area around the river help improve water quality? What impact can this have on fish and other aquatic wildlife?
- What else do you want to learn about water quality?

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Additional activity ideas

Leaf cleanup

Leaves are one major source of pollution into waterways because they can act like fertilizer in nearby water sources, contributing to algae blooms. Gather friends, family and neighbors for a leaf cleanup to rake, collect, bag and dispose of leaves properly. Find disposal options at www.hennepin.us/yardwaste.

Litter scavenger hunt

- To organize a litter hunt and cleanup near your program site, prepare sturdy gloves for all participants and large trash bags. Consider using recycling bins to collect recyclables that were picked up. You may also want a scale to weigh trash collected, maps of the area and list of scavenger hunt categories for each team (categories could include biggest, smallest, heaviest, weirdest, oldest.)
- Talk with participants about how streets connect with local rivers and lakes. Ask participants to brainstorm examples of pollution that could be taken by rain into lakes and rivers via storm sewers. Discuss other materials that can be carried into water sources and why it is a problem.
- Explain that participants are going to go on a litter scavenger hunt and help reduce pollution in the process. Talk about safety issues in picking up trash: wear gloves, don't touch anything sharp, and, if you are working with youth, ask adults if they are unsure if something is safe to pick up.
- Form small teams, pass out gloves, trash bags and scavenger hunt categories on a handout or describe the categories. Set a time limit. An adult should accompany groups of younger children.
- Gather at the end to weigh the trash picked up, sort recyclables and reflect.

Resources

Your watershed district may provide assistance in selecting a site or offer other opportunities to get involved.