

Litter Picking Events

If you, your school or local community group would like to organise a voluntary litter picking event in your area, we can support you through lending litter picking tools and bags. We can also arrange for collection of the litter after the event. If you are considering a larger community clear up in your area, and larger items of waste and graffiti need to be removed, we may also be able to help.

Guidance for volunteer litter pickers

Litter picking in a public place, especially on or by the Highway will always involve a level of risk to the individuals involved and possibly members of the general public.

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 is carried out to establish the risks and to identify and note the possible hazards. You may have already produced a suitable risk assessment to cover the litter picking event, if not, a generic litter picking risk assessment is available through us on our webpage at www.westnorthants.gov.uk

The event group leader should ensure that all people involved in the litter pick are made aware of the findings of the risk assessment before the litter pick begins. 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, then it should be avoided.

Protective Clothing and Equipment

It is recommended that the following items should be used at all times by volunteers undertaking litter picks:

- Gloves – to minimise physical contact with dangerous materials
- Reflective hi-visibility waistcoats or light coloured clothing - to clearly highlight volunteers to traffic and pedestrians.
- Litter pickers - to avoid direct contact with litter and repetitive bending.
- Strong boots or shoes – to reduce likelihood of slips/falls and severity of any resulting injury.
- Mobile phones – should be carried to contact the emergency services (if required).

The Council, subject to availability, can provide the loan of a Kit. Call us on 0300 126 7000 to arrange the booking.

Dangerous Materials

The following materials may be encountered during litter picks and should be treated with caution:

- Broken glass – Avoid direct hand contact; remove using a litter picker and dispose of in a solid container.
- Drug related litter/hypodermics - These should not be touched. Contact the Council for removal.
- Suspect materials and fly tipping - Items that are possibly dangerous such as unknown liquids in containers, asbestos, or fly tipping should not be touched. Contact the Council for specialist removal.

If there is any doubt about an item, leave it, and let the Council know.

General Site Safety

Litter picking of areas beside roads should be carried out with extreme caution, due to the risk of being struck by vehicles. Litter picking should be restricted to areas where there are wide verges or pavements, suitable for pedestrians, and should be carried out facing oncoming traffic. It is essential when litter picking adjacent to busy roads that hi-visibility garments are worn and that the litter picks are only conducted in good visibility conditions. Volunteers should never clear litter from highways.

Avoid reaching into hedges or undergrowth that may expose the face, eyes and skin to scratches from thorns or branches.

Avoid working close to rivers and ditches or on steep slopes, as there is an increased risk of slips and falls.

If an item of litter cannot be safely reached with a litter picker, leave it.

Be mindful of wildlife. Avoid disturbing animals and birds that may be nesting and also 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 road works) or where the public do not have a right to entry.

Lifting and Handling Materials

Volunteers should be aware of the risk of injury by 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 hazardous contents.
- Avoid cuts to legs by ensuring that glass and other sharps are placed in sturdy containers, and not directly into the plastic bags.
- Decide if an item can be safely moved either by one or two people.
- Only try to move an item if this can be done so without straining.
- When lifting an item, bend the legs and keep the back straight.

Weather

Litter picking is an outdoor event and volunteers need to be appropriately dressed. If it is hot and sunny applying sunscreen, wearing a cap and long sleeved shirts are advised to protect against sunburn. Bottled water is also advisable to guard against dehydration. If the weather is cold, wet or windy volunteers should wear clothing that will keep them warm and dry.

Poor visibility conditions resulting from time of day or weather conditions may significantly increase the risks associated with litter picking, especially on roads. Consideration should be given to arranging the event for suitable times of day and suspending the event if visibility reduces.

Young Volunteers

Age plays a big part in people's ability to recognise and avoid risk. With that in mind, an adult should always supervise volunteers under the age of 18 and permission for their participation should be gained from a parent or guardian. In the interest of safeguarding children, adults tasked with supervising or working with volunteers under the age of 18 should be Criminal Record Bureau checked.

Hygiene

To avoid illness from poor hygiene, all those taking part in the litter pick should:

- Wear gloves at all times
- Cover any cuts or grazes with surgical tape or waterproof plasters
- Avoid rubbing the mouth and eyes whilst working
- Wash hands and forearms before eating, drinking, smoking or going to the toilet.

Insurance

Volunteer litter pickers are not working for, or on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council, therefore you are not covered by the Council's 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 represent an organisation such as a local school it is probable that you already have insurance in place but it is important to check that litter picking activities are covered under such insurance. If not, a suitable extension should be made to the policy.

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 West Northamptonshire Council and therefore the Council cannot be held liable for any loss, damage or injury caused as a result of the actions and omissions of volunteers.