

Stream Cleanup

A stream cleanup involves volunteers walking or paddling stream channels, collecting trash and recording information. Information recorded can include types and quantities of trash, debris too large to move, and problems encountered, such as clogged channels, illegal dumping, or erosion. Stream Cleanups are an effective way to promote storm water awareness. They are applicable to all waterbodies and teach citizens the connection between stormwater and the local streams, through direct involvement. Cleanup efforts foster a sense of community ownership of the waterbody. They are an effective way to improve habitat, water quality, and aesthetics. Cleanups can provide a lead-in to other volunteer projects, increasing community participation in a variety of other storm water activities.

Designate a leader

An individual is needed to schedule and organize the cleanup projects, recruit volunteers, coordinate trash disposal, and assign staff for supervision. Schedule the cleanup several months in advance to provide adequate time to organize volunteers and handle logistical issues. Secure advance permission to conduct cleanup projects on private property.

Involve the Community

Almost anyone can get involved in cleanup activities: schoolchildren, youth groups, neighborhood associations, local environmental groups, and individuals. Cleanups have tasks of varying levels of difficulty, so there is something for people of all ages and skills to do.

Marketing, partnerships, and the media

Stream cleanups educate the greater community through media coverage and publicity efforts. Advertise the program and let service groups know about cleanup project opportunities. Ads can be placed in newsletters, newspapers, and utility bill inserts or posted on the municipal web site. Also, public service announcements can be distributed to radio and television stations. The coordinator can solicit known service groups, environmental organizations, schools, and other groups likely to participate. Municipalities can partner with other community and environmental groups to develop a program that relieves the municipality of the burden of organization while providing the volunteer groups with the authority to access both public and private (with permission) lands and equipment for trash collection and hauling. Involve groups and community leaders that are skilled in volunteer recruiting as well as advertising, maximizing participation and exposure. Coordinate with the Annual NC Big Sweep stream clean-up for maximum exposure.

Identify cleanup sites and requirements

Volunteer monitoring data can help identify stream reaches that are heavily impacted by trash. Stream reaches can be prioritized based on the goals of the watershed program. You might target high-visibility or easily accessible areas for exposure or convenience; or target the most ecologically sensitive reaches.

Determine the level of effort needed for each project, including the equipment and supervision. Then determine the volunteer group size and experience needed for the project. Scout the areas ahead of time to determine whether they are free of danger or what areas should be avoided.

Plan another stream cleanup in advance

A one-time-only cleanup event might raise awareness in the community, but it will not keep trash out of the waterbody. To maintain water quality, cleanup efforts must recur seasonally or annually. Use the current clean-up to advertise and build awareness of future cleanups. Coordinate with the Annual NC Big Sweep stream clean-up for maximum exposure. NC Big Sweep's mission is litter-free watersheds. Volunteer groups can be encouraged to establish Adopt-A-Stream programs, such as the NC Streamwatch Program, to provide for repeated cleanups at a particular site or set of sites.

Educate the participants

Have experts on hand at the event to discuss the stream's ecology and history. As a result, the accomplishments of volunteers include a cleaner river and a better informed community at large.

Working with Volunteers

Once volunteers are signed up for an event, information should be distributed to them, including meeting times, recommendations for clothing and footwear, inclement weather contingencies, and any other pertinent information. This information can be developed into a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list, to be posted and used in the future.

Volunteer safety should be maximized by providing safety vests and an adequate number of staff members for supervision based on the type of volunteers used. First aid kits should be kept nearby during the cleanup project. If cleanups are located along a roadside, the area should be clearly marked with signs, flags, and cones to alert passing motorists.

Collected garbage, and information

Be prepared for everything. Identify a disposal site for the collected garbage. Also, identify individuals to notify about unexpected garbage. Involve the local solid waste coordinator. Make recycling available. Not recycling may cause consternation among volunteers. Keep tabs on what was collected and how much was collected. This information can be used to teach the community afterward and can often be incorporated into municipal bulletins and informational material. Remember, this event is not only about collecting garbage and cleaning up a stream, it is also about educating and involving the public.

Recognize volunteers for their work.

Participation certificates, T-shirts, cups, and other promotional items are always appreciated awards. Also, lunch can be provided through donations from local businesses. Groups can be recognized briefly at government functions such as council meetings.

Stream and river cleanup activities are typically inexpensive since volunteer labor is used. The supplies required for these efforts—durable gloves, garbage bags, and clipboards for recording information—are generally easy to find, are not costly, and may be donated by local businesses, further reducing costs. Collection of the garbage may require some additional expense, but municipal equipment can be used to facilitate transport of the trash.

For more information, see EPA's Stream Cleanup website at

[http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/menuofbmps/invol_7.cfm]

NC Streamwatch

[http://www.ncwater.org/Education_and_Technical_Assistance/Stream_Watch]

NC Big Sweep [<http://www.ncbigssweep.org>]