

How to Host a Community Cleanup Event



Coastal Cleanup, Pescadero State Beach



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH
ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH SERVICES

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How to Host a Community Cleanup Event

I. Why You're Here and Why We Need You!

San Mateo County is a beautiful place to call home. It's no wonder you want to help maintain its beauty by hosting a community cleanup event. Environmental Health Services' Pollution Prevention Program in partnership with the [California Coastal Commission](#) has been coordinating Coastal Cleanup in the County for many years. We've built up a network of over 50 site captains and cleanup locations. Each year during Coastal Cleanup over 20,000 lbs. of trash and recyclables get removed from beaches, creeks, parks, and neighborhoods. We're so thankful for volunteers like you that make a huge difference. Of course, there is always more to be done, and we need your help! Here are some of the most common types of trash we found in 2023 that you're likely to find during your event too.



Here are some ways the County and State work to prevent some commonly littered items from becoming litter in the first place. Prevention tactics in orange are easy ways you can help. Visit the links for more information.

Type of Litter	Prevention Tactic
1. Cigarette Butts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the Cigarette Butt Litter Prevention Program • Help distribute pocket ashtrays • Connect people you know who smoke with cessation resources • Join the Tobacco Education Coalition • Educate people that butts are made of plastic and do not biodegrade
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, Chips, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy in bulk to reduce packaging • Use reusable containers • The Sustainability Department's Schools Program educates the next generation on sustainability
3. Construction Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sustainability Department's Construction and Demolition Program requires construction projects to salvage, reuse, or recycle solids and at least 65% of all construction and demolition debris generated by the project • Upcycle construction materials you use and purchase recycled construction materials to eliminate waste going to the landfill and ending up as litter
4. Plastic Grocery Bags	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reusable bag ordinance reduced the amount of single-use plastic bags distributed • Use reusable grocery and produce bags
5. Plastic Beverage Bottles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CalRecycle's Beverage Container Recycling Program • Use reusable bottles • Drink more tap water • Prepare for outings by always bringing your reusable bottle or coffee mug

6. Metal and Plastic Bottle Caps, Beverage Cans, and Glass Beverage Bottles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See #5
7. Gloves & Masks (PPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage vaccination • Wear a reusable mask • Wash and sanitize your hands instead of wearing gloves

II. Preparation

Think through your general cleanup goals to get started.

Who:

- Do you already have a group of cleanup volunteers, or will you need to recruit volunteers? Maybe you don't want to plan a cleanup but want to join an [established event](#) instead! See the bottom of the website for some cleanup options to join.
- Are you a part of a school? Check out the Coastal Commission's [Schoolyard Cleanup](#) information.
- Do you want to cleanup solo in your neighborhood? Visit our page with information on [Neighborhood Cleanups](#).

What:

Do you want to set a goal of covering a specific number of streets, length of beach, or how many volunteers to recruit?

When:

Month | Day | Year | Time

Where:

Will you clean up a specific neighborhood, beach, park, trail, or street?
Address | Specific meetup location at the address | Parking information

Why:

Does the area you want to clean up have a litter problem? Is the area safe for volunteers? Scout your site to determine the need before finalizing the location.

Timeline:

Give yourself ample time (a couple of months!) to solidify your cleanup plans like trash pickup, promoting your event, and gathering the materials.

III. Contact Appropriate Staff & Confirm Trash Pickup Plans

After you've decided what location you'd like to clean up, it's time to contact and alert the appropriate people to help confirm logistics like who can haul away the pile of trash and recyclables you collect.

If you're cleaning up your neighborhood and your event will be small, you can likely use your home trash and recycle bins.

If you're lucky, the location you clean up will already have trash and recycle bins suitable for the amount and type of waste you collect.

[Contact us](#) with where you're planning to clean up so we can connect you with the appropriate contacts. Here is who will generally be able to assist with trash hauling and need to know about your cleanup event.

If you're planning an event at:

- A San Mateo County State Beach, [contact State Parks](#). Consider requesting parking fee waivers, if applicable.
- A San Mateo County park, [contact County Parks](#). Consider requesting parking fee waivers, if applicable.
- A city/town park or trail, contact the city's parks department and/or public works.
- A street or residential area where more trash will be picked up than will fit in your home bin, contact your city's public works department and/or your [local waste hauler](#).

If you do not confirm your trash pickup and decide to haul it to a transfer station in the County, there will likely be a significant fee; plan ahead to avoid disposal fees.

Some cities/towns, parks, or beaches may require the completion of waiver forms or have other requirements. If you want to create your own waiver, [here is an example from the Coastal Commission](#)*.

*Environmental Health Services does not recommend, endorse, or guarantee coverage by creating your own waiver and recommends using an established waiver provided by staff from a city/town/park contact, if applicable.

It's important to contact and alert the appropriate people well before the event as there could be other events, or construction planned that you are unaware of which may conflict with your event date.

These contacts may also have extra supplies you can borrow such as trash grabbers and buckets. They may also be able to help you promote your event!

IV. Gather Materials

💡 = Pollution Prevention Tip

1. Gloves - Essential

- a. 💡 Use and encourage your volunteers to bring their own reusable garden/work gloves from home.
- b. 💡 If using disposable gloves, you may need only 1 glove.
 - 👉 One hand holds bag (no glove)
 - 👉 Other hand picks up trash (gloved)
- c. If you need disposable gloves, we can likely provide these to you. Email pollutionprevention@smcgov.org with the quantity and sizes you'd like.

2. Bags - Essential

- a. 💡 Keep recyclables collected separate from trash collected.
- b. If you need trash and recycle bags, we can likely provide these to you. Email pollutionprevention@smcgov.org with the quantity you'd like.

3. Buckets - Optional

- a. 💡 Encourage volunteers to bring their buckets.
- b. 💡 Encourage volunteers to NOT line their buckets with a bag. Keep large garbage bags at a central location for volunteers to dump their buckets of trash into a big bag to reduce the number of plastic bags used overall.
- c. Ask your local hardware store if they can donate buckets to your cause in-kind. Consider storage – will you keep the buckets or will you let volunteers take them home? Clean them prior to storage to avoid attracting critters.

4. Trash Grabbers - Optional

- a. Can be a nice tool to reduce bending and stooping.
- b. Can use old kitchen tongs.
- c. [Make a DIY pair using paint sticks \(skip to 2:34\)](#)
- d. Some cities may have trash grabbers that can be borrowed.
- e. Be aware they may break and cannot be recycled.

5. Signage - Optional

- a. Alert volunteers of your location with a sign.
- b. Borrow a 9 ft. tall cigarette butt litter banner flag from us to help raise awareness on cigarette butt litter and help volunteers find you. [See images here.](#)

6. Table - Optional

- a. Place a sign-up form to collect volunteer information or have volunteers sign a waiver form.
- b. Display materials for volunteers to take. Ask us about our pollution prevention outreach materials!
- c. If your cleanup location already has a picnic table, you'll have one less item to bring.

7. Paper Data Cards or Cell Phone to Use Clean Swell App

- a. 💡 Opt to use the Clean Swell App instead of paper to reduce waste (more on this app in the Measure Your Impact section below).
- b. Bring pencils if using the Ocean Conservancy's [paper data card](#). Email pollutionprevention@smcgov.org with the quantity of paper data cards you'd like (while supplies last).



Coastal Cleanup Event Setup Examples – The Club at Westpoint, Redwood City High School

8. Refreshments & Restrooms – Optional

- a. If you can supply or have some refreshments donated for your event, your volunteers will appreciate it. Mention this in your outreach material!
- b. Nearby restrooms are a bonus, if there will be no restroom available it would be good to mention this in your outreach material.

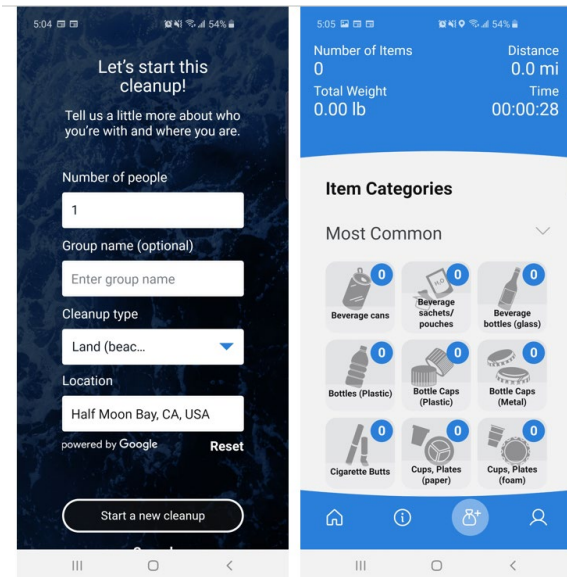
V. Measure Your Impact

It's awesome, and impactful to see how much and what types of trash you collect at your event by collecting data.

You can have volunteers use the Ocean Conservancy's [paper data card](#), or have them download the [Clean Swell App](#). The app and paper data card are available in Spanish.

If using the app, you can log in to the coastalcleanupdata.org database post-event and pull all the volunteer data for your event to see your total impact (a desktop computer is recommended vs. mobile to easily filter through data). If everyone uses the same group name in the Clean Swell app, it's much easier to pull the information. Pick a short name

pollutionprevention@smcgov.org if you need help pulling the report.



Clean Swell App Images



Pullable Report Examples

VI. Volunteer Orientation, Safety, & Non-Emergency Contacts

Volunteer Orientation

Thank you for taking time out of your day to help beautify this area! All the litter here poses a threat to wildlife and is an eyesore, so do your best to pick up everything you find that's man-made!

Everyone should have filled out a waiver form already. Has anyone not filled out a waiver? (if applicable)

(Wait for a response – If anyone has **NOT** signed a waiver form, send them back to the check-in table/area.)

Safety Talk

DO:

1. **DO** follow the most current San Mateo County Health Order at all times to keep yourself and other volunteers safe from COVID-19 and other transmissible illnesses. Visit smchealth.org/coronavirus for more information.
2. **DO** wear gloves, closed-toe shoes, a hat, and sunblock.
3. **DO** bring water to stay hydrated.

4. **DO** stay in teams of at least two.
5. **DO** supervise children at all times.
6. **DO** be cautious and aware of sensitive habitats to protect our environment.
7. **DO** only pick up human-created matter (plastics, metal, glass, Styrofoam, etc.). Natural debris (algae, kelp, driftwood, etc.) is part of the natural system we are working to restore and should be left alone.
8. **DO** pick up small pieces of trash like cigarette butts and small plastic pieces. These items will continue to break down into smaller pieces and will end up traveling down storm drains where they will enter our bay and ocean, harming wildlife.

DON'T:

9. **DON'T** participate in the event if you are experiencing any COVID-19 or other transmissible illness symptoms or are sick.
10. **DON'T** attempt to access an area that appears unsafe, steep, etc.
11. **DON'T** touch or pick up dead animals or attempt to move injured animals. Make your site captain(s) aware of the animals and where they are.
12. **DON'T** pick up syringes, needles, or any sharp objects. Mark the area and notify the site captain(s) or local official of their location.
13. **DON'T** pick up items near a homeless encampment and/or site. If you encounter a homeless site, please notify the site captain and leave the trash there as it may be their belongings.
14. **DON'T** go near any hazardous materials (large drums, etc.). Inform your site captain(s) immediately of the material's location so that the right people can be called for help.
15. **DON'T** lift anything too heavy. When in doubt, don't try!
16. **DON'T** disturb plants or animals.
17. **DON'T** overexert yourself and risk sunburn, heat exhaustion, or dehydration.



City of Burlingame's Safety Poster

Non-Emergency Contacts

City/Town	Police	Fire	Public Works (Sharps/Large Bulky Items)
Atherton	650-688-6500	650-688-8400	650-752-0570
Belmont	650-595-7400	650-595-7492	650-595-7427
Brisbane	415-467-1212	415-657-4300	415-508-2130
Broadmoor	650-755-3840	650-755-1500	
Burlingame	650-777-4100	650-558-7600	650-558-7230
Colma	650-997-8321	650-755-5666	650-757-8888
Daly City	650-991-8119	650-991-8138	650-991-8097
East Palo Alto	650-321-1112	650-688-8400	650-853-3189
Foster City	650-286-3300	650-286-3350	650-286-8140
Half Moon Bay	650-726-8288	650-726-5213	650-726-8260
Hillsborough	650-375-7470	650-558-7600	650-375-7444
Menlo Park	650-330-6300	650-688-8400	650-330-6740
Millbrae	650-259-2300	650-259-2400	650-259-2388
Pacifica	650-738-7314	650-738-7362	650-738-3760
Portola Valley	650-363-4911	650-851-1626	650-851-1700
Redwood City	650-780-7100	650-780-7400	650-780-7464
San Bruno	650-616-7100	650-616-7096	650-616-7065
San Carlos	650-802-4277	650-780-7400	650-802-4204
San Mateo	650-522-7700	650-522-7900	650-522-7300
South San Francisco	650-877-8900	650-829-3950	650-877-8550
Unincorporated County	650-363-4911	650-345-1612	650-363-4100
Woodside	650-851-3535	650-851-1594	650-851-6790

Wildlife:	Contact:
Distressed marine mammals (and turtles)	The Marine Mammal Center 415-289-SEAL (7325)
Sick, injured, or orphaned animals (including sea birds)	Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA 650-340-7022
Dead seabirds	Dead seabirds should be left in place.

Hazardous Waste:	Contact:
Oil and chemical spills	CA Office of Emergency Response 800-OILS911 (645-7911)
Other hazardous waste	Call your local fire department.

VII. Checklist – Before, During, and After Your Event

Pre-Event:

1. Plan the who, what, when where, and why of your event.
2. Contact us, Environmental Health Services Pollution Prevention Program.
3. Contact appropriate people to arrange for the cleanup and trash removal.
4. Scout your site.
5. Recruit volunteers – Contact your social circle, share on social media, Nextdoor, make a flyer.
6. Pick up materials from us or city/town contacts, or donations from hardware stores.
7. Prepare a volunteer orientation and safety talk.
8. Distribute and collect liability waiver forms if applicable.
9. Confirm your logistics and trash pickup.
10. Send out event details and reminders to volunteers.
11. Download the Clean Swell app and remind volunteers to download it.
12. Optional: Plan a post-cleanup appreciation party.

During the Event:

1. Arrive at your site one hour before the cleanup to set up.
2. Sign-in volunteers.
3. Organize volunteers for the cleanup.
4. Give orientation and safety talk (*see page 9*).
5. **CLEAN UP!**
6. Take photos – post them on social media with permission from volunteers.
7. Help orient any volunteers that arrive late.

Post-Event

1. Collect any paper data cards or remind volunteers to submit their Clean Swell app data.
2. Thank your volunteers before they leave!
3. Optional: Submit paper data cards to EHS via mail:

Pollution Prevention Program
Environmental Health Services
2000 Alameda de las Pulgas, Suite 100
San Mateo, CA 94403

4. Give any borrowed items back to contacts like buckets or trash pickers.
5. When back at your computer, and if the Clean Swell app was used, check out your final event results by logging into coastalcleanupdata.org and pulling a report for your location. If you need assistance doing this, please contact us.
6. Send your volunteers a follow-up thank you and share the cleanup results and photos with them along with any future cleanup opportunities.

We hope this guide will make planning your event a success. Please contact us at pollutionprevention@smcgov.org



Coastal Cleanup Volunteers, various locations