



# Rock River Sweep

## Organizer's Handbook

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Provided by

**Rock River Sweep.org**

(A river clean-up... and more)

<http://www.rockriversweep.org>

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**Rock River Sweep**  
is a one day river clean-up  
event sponsored by  
**Rock River Sweep.org**  
[www.rockriversweep.org](http://www.rockriversweep.org)  
in association with  
**American Rivers**

## **About the Handbook**

Thank you for your interest in getting involved in the Rock River Sweep. Organizing a river cleanup is a tremendously rewarding and enjoyable experience. To help guide you through the organizing process, **Rock River Sweep.org**, with the gracious assistance of American Rivers has compiled the following Organizer's Handbook. The organizing tips in this handbook are based off of past river cleanup experiences. The tips in this handbook are merely ideas and suggestions. These suggestions are not rules for cleanup organizers to follow, nor should they be considered a safety plan. Volunteering at cleanups on or near rivers can be physically demanding and dangerous. All river cleanup participants should be told that they are responsible for their own safety. While these tips can and should be shared with volunteers, organizers should not assert that this Handbook can be relied upon to protect volunteers from risk.

**Rock River Sweep.org** *Rock River Sweep Organizer's Handbook* is based on American Rivers' Organizer's Handbook and the informational excerpts from their handbook contained herein are used with permission of American Rivers.

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## Section 1: Planning Your Cleanup

### Site Selection

What is true for real estate is also true for a river cleanup site: location, location, location. There are several things to carefully consider when choosing a cleanup site.

#### • Identify the Strengths and Weaknesses of Your Group

- Understand the limitations of your cleanup.
- Factors to take into account include: age, experience, health limitations, and comfort level with the tasks at hand.
- Choose a site where everyone can comfortably participate and accomplish your group's goals.

#### • Do You Want to Work From the River or Along the Shore?

- Floating a river is encouraged and can be an effective way to access garbage in the river.
- When working with larger groups, walking along the bank may be the best way to execute your cleanup so everyone can participate.
- Another option is finding a terrestrial site near the river that offers a variety of challenges and tasks for the group to tackle.
- Also don't forget to consider picking up trash on land away from the water since trash, like water, flows downhill, and all trash could end up in the river eventually.
- Consider boat access, parking, safety (working near busy roads poses a risk), and time allocated for the cleanup.

#### • Preparing the Site for Cleanup

- Scout the area a few weeks or even months in advance to identify target areas.
- Identify hazards and other potential safety issues. When you tell volunteers about these hazards, remember not to make any promises about these being the only hazards on the river. Remind volunteers that they are responsible for their own safety.
- Look for paths along the banks of the river that make it easy for people to maneuver around the river bank.
- Establish an open area as your "base of operations" where volunteers will check in and obtain supplies.

## Securing Permission

### • Is the Land Public?

- Find out who owns or manages the land. This may require a few phone calls. One place to start is the county auditor or an office dealing with land titles (this is public information).
- If the land is publicly held, contact the government entity that manages the property. Obtaining permission to organize a cleanup on public land is usually easy. After all, you are doing the agency or property manager a service!
- Notify the land management agency about your planned river cleanup event.
- Emphasize that your cleanup is a volunteer community service project. Ask if the agency would be willing to sponsor the event, by providing equipment for volunteers or trash disposal. Chances are they'll offer to at least help with trash disposal if not more.

### • Is the Land Private?

Securing permission from private landowners can be tricky and may require some persuasion. When speaking to a private landowner, it is best to focus on the positives of your cleanup.

- Remember, they might not be the source of the trash you aim to clean up.
- Explain that you would like to hold a cleanup on the river and ask permission to do so.

Framing your cleanup as a larger community service project aiming to beautify and restore an important natural resource to the community shifts the attention away from the trash located on their property.

- Consider informing the landowner that your cleanup, Rock River Sweep, sponsored by Rock River Sweep.org is part of National River Cleanup, sponsored by American Rivers, a nationwide movement to clean up thousands of stream and river miles across the country.

## Volunteer Recruitment

Of the many places from which to recruit volunteers. Here are just a few suggestions:

- **Places of Worship**

- Churches, temples, mosques and other religious organizations in your community are great places to seek organizational support and individual volunteers.
- When approaching a religious organization, appeal to their role in the community and the social benefits of your cleanup.

- **The Scouts**

- River cleanups are a very well suited community service project for the Scouts. Cleanups get young people outdoors, on the water, teach the importance of environmental stewardship, and have fun all at the same time!
- Scouts, by creed, are committed to community service projects.
- Scouts add youth and energy to any cleanup.
- Contact your local troops well in advance. Troop agendas fill up quickly, especially during the spring and summer months.

- **Local Outfitters and Canoe/Kayak/Outing Clubs**

- Contact the manager of your local outfitter or gear shop. It shouldn't take much convincing for them to see the benefits your cleanup provides for their business.
- Ask your local outfitter for sponsorship or promotional assistance. Outfitters can pass out flyers or help advertise the cleanup at their shop.

- **Local Sierra Club and Audubon Society Chapters or other environmental organizations**

- Look up local chapters online and put a call into or send an email to the chapter organizer.
- Ask them to add your cleanup to their chapter events calendars and email their membership informing them about your cleanup.

- **Co-Workers, Friends, Neighbors and Family**

- One of the best recruitment strategies is word of mouth, plain and simple.

## Informing the Media: Turn Your Cleanup into a News Story

Your river cleanup presents an opportunity to talk to your local reporters about the event and the importance of healthy rivers for healthy communities. Don't let it go to waste!

- **Start local**

- Your local newspaper, whether a daily or weekly, is very likely to be interested in covering your cleanup.
- Your cleanup gives local media a rare opportunity to run a good news story about the environment in their community.

- **Start early**

- Call reporters at least one week prior to your scheduled event, so that they can inform their news editors and plan to attend.

- **Prepare before you talk to reporters**

- Plan what you will say in advance. Start with a one sentence message you absolutely, positively want to see in print. We suggest: "We're cleaning up the Rock River because a healthier river makes for a healthier community that everyone can enjoy."
- A sample press release will be provided by **Rock River Sweep.org** upon request.

- **Call the right desk**

- If you have local reporter contacts, those are the first calls you should make.
- If you don't have those contacts, this is your chance to establish them. Call the main switchboard of the paper and ask for the "News Desk." Repeat with your local television news stations.
- Try to invite reporters to attend your event to see your volunteers in action.
- Also, contact local radio shows that you would like to appear on. Ask for the show's producer and tell them you'd like to talk about the upcoming event. This is also a great way to recruit more volunteers.

- **Fast pitch**

- Stick to the basics when you get someone on the phone: you're planning a river cleanup and you'd like the community to know all about it.
- Get the name of the person you spoke with and an email address or fax number and send the press release immediately to the attention of that person. Follow up by phone.

- **Stay Positive**

- Stick to the positive — tell them what you hope to achieve with your cleanup. Include information about your organization and the volunteers who will be participating.
- It is recommended that you connect your event to other cleanups that will be happening nationwide as part of National River Cleanup.
- If your cleanup is scheduled in June, try to remind the reporter that it's also National Rivers Month – it makes for a great news "hook."

## **Civic Leader Engagement**

Another way to bring attention to your cleanup is to involve civic leaders in your community. Your mayor, city or county council members, state legislators, even Congressional leaders will likely jump at the opportunity to participate in an event like this – especially if they know that members of the press are covering your cleanup (and vice-versa). Your river cleanup gives them an opportunity to interact with voters. More importantly, it gives you, the constituent, a chance to engage them on issues facing a river in their district -- which you are concerned about. But elected officials won't show up unless you invite them. Here's how:

### **• Making First Contact**

- Call his/her office and ask to speak with the scheduler.
- Introduce yourself, your organization (if appropriate), and briefly describe your upcoming cleanup. Tell them you'd like the civic leader to attend.
- If you can't get your cleanup onto their calendar immediately or they only pencil you in as a tentative engagement, accept it for the time being. However, ask for an in-person meeting with the civic leader, before the cleanup, at their office.
- Realistically, you are going to need to make your request at least two months before the cleanup takes place to get a firm commitment on your first try, and even then a civic leader usually reserves the right to back-out at any time.
- To increase the likelihood of an affirmative response, try to meet with the civil leader before the event to establish rapport.

### **• What to Do With a Civic Leader at Your Cleanup**

- It's important to greet them personally upon their arrival (another reason to have a pre-meeting – this way you'll know what they look like in advance).
- Thank them for coming, walk them through the sign-in process and introduce them to your cleanup leaders.
- Ask how long they plan to stay. You want to try to properly see them off.
- During the Pre-Cleanup Briefing give the civic leader(s) in attendance an opportunity to say a few words.
- Once the cleanup up starts, take pictures of yourself with them and connect them to members of the media that have shown up to cover your cleanup.

### **• Follow Up**

- Send a formal thank you for their participation (a hand-written note is best) accompanied by event photos and cleanup stats, if you have them.
- View your cleanup as your foot in the door. Now that you've gained access it's up to you to build the relationship.

## **Other Leaders in the Community**

Consider inviting school principals, members of the area chamber of commerce, religious leaders and other leaders in the community to participate in your river cleanup.

## **Section 2: Executing Your River Cleanup**

### **Site Preparation on Cleanup Day**

There are a few things you may want to take care of before volunteers, the press and VIPs arrive.

- Check the weather outlook for the day and make note of forecasted inclement weather.
- Try to arrive at least an hour before the river cleanup is scheduled to start. You might want to ask a few of your volunteers and cleanup leaders to arrive early to help set up.
- As you drive in, it is recommended you place signs along the road guiding river cleanup participants to your cleanup site. This is something to consider if your cleanup is “off of the beaten path.”
- Survey the site and look for any new safety concerns that may have cropped up since your last site scouting visit. Do your best to explain any hazards you have identified to volunteers, before they begin to pick up trash. Remind volunteers that they are responsible for their own safety and that there may be additional hazards.
- If you plan on floating the river, check the water levels and the flow of the river for assurance about whether the water is safe to navigate.
- Set up a check-in station near the parking area. (see Volunteer Check-in section for details)
- Call vendors and service providers (waste management authorities, caterers, and boat liveries) to confirm their arrival and review instructions for finding your cleanup.

### **Volunteer Check-in**

Try to keep a record of all volunteers as they arrive. Place a “check-in” station near the parking area so that volunteers can’t get things like trash bags, supplies, refreshments, etc. without signing in. It’s important to try to have this station manned at all times during the cleanup.

### **\*Registration**

Standardized volunteer registration forms will be provided by **Rock River Sweep.org**

### **Pre-Cleanup Briefing**

This is your opportunity to review safety issues and cleanup instructions, thank special guests, sponsors and volunteers. Reporters may quote you from your briefing remarks. So plan your talk ahead of time, and keep your remarks concise. Also acknowledge the VIPs in attendance and give them an opportunity to address the group.

### **• Opening Remarks**

-Briefly talk about the river, its importance to the community and the vital work you all are doing this day to protect and restore it.

- **Express Gratitude**

- It's a good idea to acknowledge and thank the VIPs, sponsors, land owners, public agencies, volunteers, trash collectors, safety boaters, etc. for their support and participation.

- **Details about of the River**

- Give the name, length, distinguishing features, and tributaries of the section of river you will be on.
- Mention the river's historical and contemporary significance (e.g. water source, fishery, old mills and factories, etc.).
- If possible, show a map of the river to help people visualize the bigger picture.

- **Safety Issues**

- Cover points in the following River Safety section.
- Introduce cleanup leaders.
- If you're picking up trash from the river, be sure to let everyone know where the take-out is located on the river.
- A good river safety resource can be found at:  
<http://www.americancanoe.org/safety/safety.lasso>.

- **Have Fun!**

- Following the safety speech, consider rallying your volunteers with some positive goals, jokes and even a "Who's ready to get out there?"

It's a good idea to establish a base of operations near your volunteer check-in area. Here are ideas for tables and stations to serve your volunteers:

- ▶ Water and other Refreshments
- ▶ First Aid and Safety
- ▶ Trash Bag and Cleanup Supplies, i.e. Gloves, Insect Repellant
- ▶ Life Jackets and Paddles (if you are floating the river)
- ▶ Organizational Information – flyers, fact sheets, reports on the river and your organization
- ▶ Media and Volunteer registration sheets

## **IMPORTANT**

**To protect yourself, be sure to have each volunteer sign an acknowledgement of risk statement upon checking in. The acknowledgement of risk informs volunteers of the dangers inherent with a river cleanup and reminds each volunteer that he or she is responsible for his or her own safety; this document will help protect you and your organization from potential liability in the event a volunteer is injured during your cleanup.**

**(Registration/Acknowledgement forms provided by Rock River Sweep.org)**

# River Safety

Do your best to see that everyone has a fun, safe and constructive day on the river. Minimizing your group's exposure to risk is the best way to prevent injuries. Although all volunteers are responsible for their own safety, this Handbook provides some suggestions to assist your volunteers in staying safe. You may want to email some of these ideas to your volunteers before the date of your cleanup event.

## • Understand Your Group

- Know the limits of your group. Consider age, skill and comfort level with the tasks at hand; don't ask your volunteers to do more than they are able.
- Inform parents and guardians that they are responsible for the supervision of their children. Do your best to see that each child has adult supervision.

## • Proper Dress

- Encourage volunteers to wear work gloves, which can be purchased affordably in bulk.
- Dress for the weather. For cold weather, encourage volunteers to wear synthetics or wool, which hold warmth even when wet.
- Pants and long sleeves help protect skin from poisonous plants, bug bites and sunburn. This is strongly recommended even in hot weather.
- Encourage participants to wear hats and work boots (preferably waterproof), or waders if volunteers will get in the water.
- Sneakers and sandals are discouraged.

## • Know your Section of River

- Scout the section of river you are going to cleanup beforehand.
- If you'll be floating the river, look for emergency take-outs throughout the section and mark them on a map.

## • Check the Weather, Know your River's Water Level and What the Level Means

- If water levels are above average **do not attempt your cleanup**, postpone it until water levels are safe.
- Rivers are dynamic drainages. In rainy situations levels may change rapidly.
- If heavy rain is forecasted, consider postponing.

## • Allow Plenty of Time for your Cleanup and Don't get Caught in the Dark

- If you'll be floating the river, know that the average paddler moves along at about two miles per hour.
- Allow extra time for trash pickup, lunch, a break, and a little cushion at the end.

## • Identify and be Aware of Risks in the Outdoors

- Snakes, insects, poison ivy, poison oak, other wildlife, etc.
- Extreme weather (heat, cold, sun, wind).

- Know where the closest medical facilities are. It's a good idea to find out if any of your volunteers has first aid/CPR training or is a medical professional. Consider alerting EMT's ahead of time about your cleanup.

- **Recommend Everyone Stay Hydrated and Fed**

- It is important that everyone drink water -- even in cold weather.
- Recommend that every individual bring a bottle of water.
- It takes energy to cleanup and paddle down a river. Consider providing snacks and/or lunch to keep people going.

- **Most Importantly, Use Common Sense.**

- If it sounds, looks or smells dangerous, it probably is.

## **Safety Tools**

Here's a list of some safety tools for your cleanup. Remember, you can't use what you don't have!

### **FIRST AID KIT**

A first aid kit is an important safety tool for any outdoor activity. For large cleanups, consider bringing several kits to accommodate a group spread out over a section of river. A standard kit bought from any local outfitter/drug store/gear shop is usually a good bet.

### **PROTECTIVE GEAR**

Many hazards and dangers on the river can easily be avoided with simple safety gear and clothing choices.

- **Suggested Protective Gear**

- Work gloves
- Work Boots with hard soles
- Protective eye-wear, if working with tools and/or machinery
- Personal Flotation Device (PFD, life-vest) (if floating the river)
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent

## **On The Water**

When traveling on a body of water in a group it is a good idea to establish ground rules to help the trip go smoothly and safely.

- **Appoint a "Lead" Boat (Front) and "Sweep" Boat (Rear)**

- Ask everyone not to go in front of the lead or behind the sweep.
- The lead and sweep should be more experienced boaters equipped with first aid kits.

- **Create an Agreeable Set of Rational Safety Guidelines**

- No diving or jumping into the water, no deliberate boat tipping, etc.
- If you can't see the last boat in the group stop until you can.
- People are more important than boats, gear and trash; take care of yourself and others first.

- **Appoint a Group Manager for each boat**

- Appoint someone to make decisions in case of an emergency.
- Decisions by consensus don't always work in emergency situations.

- **Stay together**

- Staying together allows everyone to help each other and make decisions quickly.

- **Have an Emergency Plan**

- It is a good idea to have emergency phone numbers and evacuation routes at the ready.

- **ALWAYS WEAR YOUR PFD (Life Jacket) • Identify hazards and avoid them**

- Look out for strainers (trees and debris buildups in the water).
- Look out for drops, dams and other more difficult river features.
- Steer away from fisherman, swimmers and other boaters.
- A great resource for identifying river safety issues and practices is available at:  
<http://www.americancanoe.org/safety/safety.lasso>.

## Handling Trash

Garbage in the river has a tendency to be dirty, rusty, slimy, and sometimes sharp. Use caution when handling trash from the river to avoid cuts and abrasions. Here are some suggestions:

- **Don't be Afraid to Ask for Help**

- Don't try to lift heavy objects alone.

- **Avoid Hazardous Materials**

- Drums or containers that may contain toxic waste.
- Needles and other biohazard waste are dangerous.
- Handle the following items with caution: broken glass, aerosol cans, gas cans and other containers with chemical residues or traces of volatile materials.
- Never handle live ammunition or explosives – immediately alert the authorities if such items are discovered during your cleanup.
- Wear all safety gear when handling hazardous materials such as glass and metal containers. Again, people are more important than trash.

## Section 3: Concluding Your Cleanup

### Trash Disposal

Your river cleanup has the potential to remove a substantial amount of debris. Make arrangements accordingly.

Consider contacting and alerting your local waste management authority about your river cleanup. Request that they remove the trash collected from your cleanup site and transport it to the appropriate processing facilities. These arrangements must be made ahead of time. Here's how:

- **Call your Local Waste Management Company**

- Tell them about your project and explain that it's a volunteer community service effort.
- Ask if they will haul away your garbage for free or at a discounted price.

- **Recruit Volunteers with Pickup Trucks**

- Depending on the scale and location of your cleanup it may be easiest to have volunteers haul the trash offsite to a landfill.

- **Attempt to Separate Trash into Like Materials**

- Much of your garbage will be recyclable. Take steel, aluminum, plastics and glass to the local recycling center.
- Some items may have value, such as the steel and aluminum. Making arrangements to recycle these items could help you recoup some of the costs associated with your cleanup.

- **Hazardous and Special Materials**

- Tires, batteries, chemical containers and explosives are all materials that need to be taken to special processing facilities.
- Ask your solid Waste Management District how to properly dispose of different materials.
- In the event that you discover hazardous materials, contact your state's Department of Environmental Management, Pollution Control or like agency IMMEDIATELY.

**- DO NOT ATTEMPT TO HANDLE HAZARDOUS MATERIALS ON YOUR OWN!!**

### **Post Cleanup Party**

Once your cleanup is over, you'll have a pile of trash that you and your volunteers have tirelessly collected and a more pristine river due to your efforts. Now it's time to celebrate a job well done! This will give everyone a chance to get to know one another and talk about each other's experience on the river and make new friends. It is also a great time to tell volunteers about the other programmatic work your group is engaged in and get them involved. Here are some things you might do after your cleanup.

- Go out for pizza with the group.
- Have a cookout or picnic on site.
- Consider asking a local restaurant/deli/grocery store to donate food and refreshments for your cleanup in exchange for an official sponsorship of the cleanup.

## **IMPORTANT NOTICE**

**Rock River Sweep.org** and its associated or partnering organizations do not sanction or support the sale, or consumption of alcoholic beverages at any event associated with the **Rock River Sweep**.

The name **Rock River Sweep.org**, the term **Rock River Sweep**, or any of Rock River Sweep.org associated or partnering organizations shall not be mentioned in print or any other form of communication, including but not limited to: radio, television, internet, or any other form of electronic information sharing, relating to any event promoting the sale or consumption of alcohol.

### **After Your Cleanup**

After the trash has been hauled away be sure to thank those who contributed to the success of your cleanup. Encourage them to help again next year. Also, take special care to thank reporters and VIPs (civic leaders, community leaders) individually. Following up with a phone call or note to VIPs is a great way to engage them further on other community/environmental projects of yours. Consider creating a summary that can be mailed or emailed to participants. Include the number of people that helped, sponsors and supporters of your cleanup, trash totals and photos of everyone hard at work. People will be glad to see the results and excited to participate in more cleanups. Follow-up with all reporters who covered your cleanup to give them an additional statement about the success of your river clean-up.

Please also report your trash collection statistics back to **Rock River Sweep.org** and American Rivers so that it is included in the national total of trash removed from America's rivers through National River Cleanup. Simply fill out the short online survey at <http://AmericanRivers.org/cleanup>

Try to record the amount of trash you collect (number of plastic bags, plastic water bottles, tires, etc.) It's a great way to measure the positive impacts of your cleanup.

## **Benefits of registering your local clean-up with Rock River Sweep.org and American Rivers as part of the Rock River Sweep**

Once you've registered your river cleanup as an official National River Cleanup event with American Rivers, you will have access to helpful communications and recruitment resources.

▶ Just insert your name and basic cleanup information (date, time, location, and contact telephone number) into our sample media advisory and press release to make getting media attention for your cleanup a breeze.

(Note, you will be registering your local clean-up as part of the Rock River Sweep, so when it is registered you will have to provide your section number and community name. Ex: Rock River Sweep, Section #1 Horicon, WI, or Rock River Sweep, Section #17, Oregon, IL), etc.

▶ Send the National River Cleanup e-Card to family and friends you'd like to invite to participate in your cleanup

▶ The Google map allows those interested in volunteering to find your cleanup and contact you directly.

▶ By registering your local clean-up with American Rivers at least 4 weeks in advance, American Rivers will provide plastic trash bags for your clean-up.

**Rock River Sweep** is a trash and litter clean-up. Wildlife and nature are to be respected at all times, and any disturbance of natural materials should be kept to a minimum.

**Rock River Sweep.org and its associated organizations  
thank you for your participation in this river clean-up.**