

RIVER CLEANUP

TEACHING GOALS

1. Raise students' awareness of the impacts of garbage pollution on aquatic ecosystems.
2. Carry out a project to improve quality of life in the community.

ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

1. Organize a safe and environmentally friendly cleanup of a section of the river.
2. Encourage citizens to volunteer for an activity with a direct and positive impact on their environment.

SUGGESTED APPROACH

STEP 1 – GETTING STARTED

1. **Suggest the activity** to your students, reminding them of what they observed on the fieldtrip. Use photographs of polluted rivers, documentary films on river pollution, or organize a fieldtrip to help students visualize the state of the riverbanks.
2. **Estimate the costs** of the activity. Include the cost of materials (see list) and transportation.
3. **Get approval** from your principal to organize a river cleanup with your students, informing him/her of the **activity goals** and the **cost estimate**. In fact, your cleanup activity could involve the entire school. Other schools have done this before with great success.

Planning time: 10 to 20 hours

Activity time: 6 to 10 hours

Difficulty: medium

Funds: low (- than \$50)

Suggested materials

To purchase, borrow or have sponsored:

- heavy-duty garbage bags
- recyclable garbage bags
- heavy-duty work gloves
- garden tools (shovels, rakes)

Students and volunteers should bring:

- rubber boots or closed shoes
- one plastic container per team (for broken glass)
- bottles of water (everyone should bring their own)
- long pants and long-sleeved shirts
- sunscreen and insect repellent
- compilation sheet and pencil (one per team)

The organizer should bring or provide:

- first-aid kit
- camera
- transportation to site
- posters announcing the project
- map
- results compilation sheet
- pencils
- whistle

STEP 2 – CHOICE OF PROJECT

Decide **what type of project you want to organize**. There are three options:

- contribute manpower to an already planned cleanup in your area,
- choose your cleanup site and register it with an existing program,
- choose your cleanup site and organize your own cleanup.

To find out about planned cleanups in your community, inquire with the local organization that looks after your river. If you don't know of one, contact your municipality or (in Québec) the Québec network of watershed organizations (Regroupement des organismes de bassins versant du Québec). For schools located in the St. Lawrence watershed, you can also contact your region's Priority Intervention Zone (Zone d'intervention prioritaire—ZIP) or in the Maritime provinces, you can contact your local Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP).

Another way to organize a river cleanup is to take part in the **Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-up**. This large-scale cleanup project is a nation-wide initiative of the Vancouver Aquarium and is usually held in the **third week of September**. It encourages Canadians, including teachers, to organize a cleanup activity for a body of water.

If you want to get involved in this big cleanup, there are two options. You can take part as a **site coordinator** or as a **participant** in a cleanup that already exists in your region. Just visit the Shoreline Cleanup site at <http://shorelinecleanup.ca/en> to find out more.



STEP 3 – TEAMING UP WITH YOUR MUNICIPALITY

1. Next, get **authorization from your municipality**. Your city should be aware of your project. Find the name and contact information of the city councilor responsible for environmental services by calling your city (or borough) offices or by visiting its website.
2. It is likely that your municipality will inform you that your target site is on private land. If so, you will obviously have to get the **owner's permission** before organizing a cleanup. You should clearly inform the owner of your goal and your activity's sequence of events.
3. When you contact city officials, take the opportunity to **invite them to your cleanup**. They may be very happy to demonstrate their involvement in their community.
4. You can also discuss with them how they might assist you in other ways. They could provide **financial support**, or they may be able to **provide manpower or materials**. Ask them how to dispose of the garbage you will collect and if they can help you with this. Many municipalities offer to collect the garbage and take it to the appropriate facilities.
5. If you have to dispose of the garbage yourself, consider renting or borrowing a truck or a trailer. Ask among your students if a parent could help out by lending their vehicle.

STEP 4 – RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

1. **Start recruiting volunteers** by making a list of organizations likely to be interested in your project. Think about educational institutions, volunteer organizations, outdoor clubs, environmental groups, youth groups, and community centres, for example.
2. **Contact these organizations** by telephone or e-mail to invite them to join your cleanup team. Ask them to confirm the number of volunteers who will be taking part a few days before the event so you can plan to have enough equipment available.
3. **Publicize your activity** to recruit other volunteers. Have students make posters, place ads, send e-mail invitations to other teachers, and invite the students' families.
4. **Send out a press release** to local newspapers inviting journalists to cover your event and to recruit as many volunteers as possible.



STEP 5 – LOGISTICS

1. **Arrange for transportation** to the cleanup site. If necessary, reserve a bus or arrange some other type of public transport. Better still, walk to the site.
2. **Delegate tasks** to a group of students who will not take part in the cleanup itself (parking attendant, equipment manager, communications agent, operations supervisor, etc.).
3. **Remind students** which types of garbage are recyclable and which are not. They should sort the garbage during the cleanup. Be very careful with broken glass and syringes. Try to avoid having students pick up the latter.
4. **Form teams** of 3 to 4 students. Appoint one leader per team. If possible, include one adult per team. Teams should compile data about the garbage they collect. One team of students should help you manage the site during the cleanup.
5. **Confirm the number of volunteers** who will be at your event and inform them of the items they should bring.
6. **Purchase the necessary materials.** Make sure you have enough for all the volunteers. Many stores will be able to sponsor items such as bags and work gloves. Your municipality or local river organization may very well be able to provide or lend you equipment such as shovels and rakes.
7. **Assemble the materials** and remind your students of the items they should bring from home.
8. Show your students the cleanup site and **divide it into sections** that each team will cover. Assign other sections to outside volunteers. If possible, have a map on hand, which you can use to point out the different sectors to be covered.
9. **Confirm the cleanup date and time with your municipality.** If your city has agreed to help with garbage disposal, remind them of when the cleanup will end and the locations where the garbage will be placed.
10. If applicable, **confirm your bus reservation.** Make sure there is **nearby parking** and that the site is accessible.



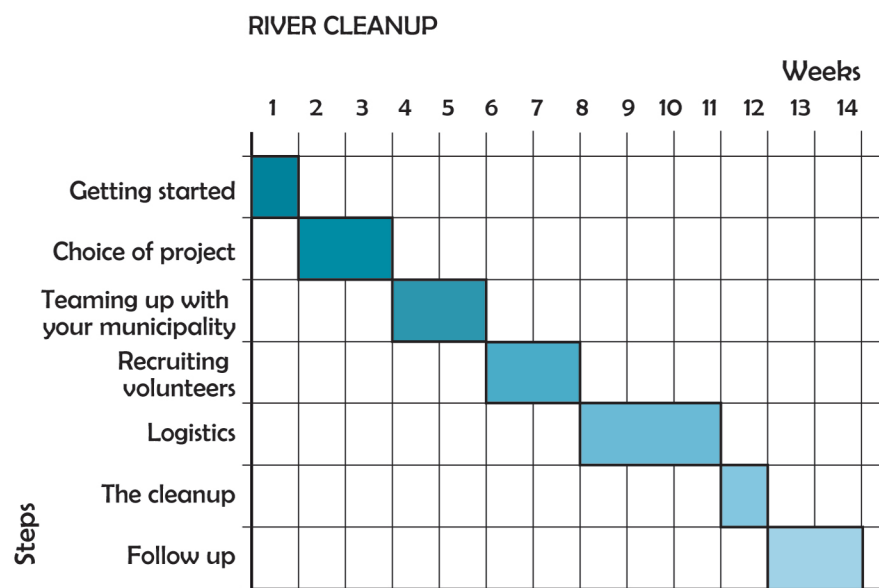
STEP 6 – THE CLEANUP

1. **Be at the site** one hour before the start of the cleanup.
2. **Put up laminated posters** to direct volunteers and to make the site more visible.
3. **Distribute** gloves and bags to all participants.
4. **Form teams** of 3 or 4 volunteers and appoint a leader for each team.
5. **Give each team** a container for broken glass.
6. **Hold an information session** with your group when everyone has arrived.
 - a. Thank volunteers for their involvement.
 - b. Introduce the cleanup site and the boundaries to respect.
 - c. Review the sectors to be covered by each team.
 - d. Remind participants to sort recyclables from other garbage.
 - e. Go over the **safety rules**.
 - Wearing gloves is mandatory.
 - Maintain a safe distance from the water; do not enter the water to collect garbage.
 - Do not remove anything that is naturally occurring.
 - Leave garbage that is integrated into the environment alone.
 - Be careful of dangerous waste. If in doubt, leave it in place.
 - Do not approach animals.
 - Be careful of vegetation.
 - Do not touch syringes.
 - Stay with your group.
 - The sound of the whistle signals the end of the cleanup.
7. **Signal the end of the cleanup** by blowing the whistle.
8. At the end of the cleanup, each team leader should **estimate the weight of the garbage** collected by their team and **record the total weight**. They should also count the number of bags of garbage and recyclables. These data will be very helpful when it comes time to sum up your activity and make your report more credible.
9. **Assemble** all the garbage bags, placing the recyclables apart from the garbage. Make sure that someone takes the recyclables to a sorting centre or an ecocentre.



STEP 7 – FOLLOW UP

1. **Compile the results** of each team leader.
2. **Organize the pictures** taken at the event.
3. **List any unusual or surprising garbage.**
4. If applicable, **send** your compiled results to the program in which you took part.
5. **Prepare a summary report** for your school, volunteers, local newspapers and your municipality. Include pictures taken before and after the activity. Highlight the data you compiled and list any unusual garbage collected. Thank the volunteers, sponsors and anyone else who helped. Discuss the next steps you plan to take as part of the project.
6. **Send out a press release** to inform the community of the event (see Action Sheet 4).
7. **Make a list of recommendations** for reducing river pollution (installing garbage receptacles, ashtrays, etc.). You could also send a letter to your local elected city official to inform them of your results and recommendations (see Action Sheet 7).

SUGGESTED PROJECT TIMETABLE**DON'T FORGET**

Hardware and grocery stores in your community may be willing to sponsor the materials needed for your cleanup. Do not hesitate to contact them for this purpose. In exchange for their assistance, give them visibility during the activity and in your media communications.

