



ALLIANCE for the GREAT LAKES  
ADOPT-A-BEACH™

# TEAM LEADER HOW-TO GUIDE



# WELCOME

## **We're so excited you are leading an Adopt-a-Beach™ event!**

Each year, Adopt-a-Beach volunteers like you make a huge difference for the health of the Great Lakes. Caring for your local stretch of the Great Lakes shoreline is a great way to get outdoors with friends, family, neighbors and coworkers and give back to the lakes that give us so much.

Hosting an Adopt-a-Beach event is easy. To guide you through the process, we've created this step-by-step checklist to help you host a successful event! If you have any questions, we're here to help. Visit [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org) or email us at [adoptabeach@greatlakes.org](mailto:adoptabeach@greatlakes.org).



## Schedule your Adopt-a-Beach cleanup at [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org).

- **Register** your event on [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org). Registering your event ahead of time:
  - > ensures we can communicate with you about your cleanup and allows your volunteers to sign the waiver before arriving at the beach.
  - > helps researchers understand the sources and impacts of pollution. Entering the litter data collected during your cleanup helps us and partner organizations develop solutions to pollution problems around the lakes.
- **Decide** if your event is public or private.
  - > **Public events** are open to anyone who is looking for a cleanup in your area. We encourage you to make your cleanups public so other committed and caring community members may join you!
  - > **Private events** are for an invite only group of volunteers, such as a school group, business, or civic group day of service, etc.



## Visit your cleanup site. A site visit will help you plan a successful event. Things to think about:

- Are the bathrooms open?
  - Is there an entrance fee?
  - Where will volunteers park and gather?
  - Where will you set up registration?
  - Is there recycling available?
  - Where will you leave your trash?
  - Are there any sensitive habitats such as sand dunes or coastal wetlands that shouldn't be trampled? Note these locations so you can inform your volunteers of the need to stay clear of them.
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- **Develop a cleanup plan.** Issues to consider include:
    - > Avoid sensitive sand dunes or coastal wetlands.
    - > Determine the boundaries of the cleanup area. It helps to have volunteers start at the furthest point and work their way back. (Trash bags can get heavy!)
    - > Are there any safety issues to consider?
    - > Is your beach large? If so, you may want to mark off sections of the beach and assign volunteers to those sections to be sure the entire beach is cleaned. Determine where the sections are and how you will mark them.



## Recruit volunteers!

- **Get the word out** using the social media toolkit, sample press release, and cleanup flyer on the Team Leader resources page at [greatlakes.org/resources](https://greatlakes.org/resources)
- **Encourage volunteers to register ahead of time.** Share your cleanup link and have them get signing the waiver out of the way!



## Gather materials for your cleanup.

### Must haves:

- Gloves (one per volunteer)
- Pencils (lots of them!)
- **Litter Monitoring Forms** (If possible, printed on card stock to stand up on the beach.)
- Check-in QR Code (print or view your QR code on your cleanup details page at [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org))
- Volunteer Roster (print or view your roster on your cleanups details page at [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org))
- **Volunteer Sign-in Sheets** (for walkup volunteers who were not able to register online or on their mobile device)
- Bags or buckets to hold garbage and recyclables. If possible, ask volunteers to bring reusable gloves and buckets to make the event more sustainable.
- Scale to weigh trash. A fishing or luggage scale works great.
- Basic first aid kit
- Fully charged mobile device (if you plan to use it to take attendance and close out your cleanup on the beach)

### Optional (but handy!) items:

- Calculator
- Camera (share your photos with us!)
- Clipboards
- Hand sanitizer
- Sieve for small items (Easy DIY sieve: Cut the bottom off a plastic milk jug and poke 10-15 holes)
- Posters or wayfinding signs
- Small folding table
- If you plan to assign specific sections to groups of volunteers, something to mark those areas (e.g., broom handles, flags, etc.)
- Alliance for the Great Lakes stickers for handing out at the end of the cleanup (let us know if you need more!)





## Set Up

- Plan to **arrive about 30 minutes before** your event. (Sometimes it is helpful to arrange for one or two volunteers to arrive early with you to help set up and hand out materials.)
- **Set up your meeting area**
  - ❑ Set up the registration table. A folding table works well or use a picnic table at the park.
  - ❑ Prepare your sign-in area and get supplies ready to hand out. (It's easy to hand out materials by clipping a bag, gloves, pencil and data card together.)
  - ❑ If you are marking assigned cleanup sections on a large beach, set up your section markers.
- **Post directional signs** to the meeting location or let park staff know where volunteers can find you.



## Getting Started...

- **Important! Check in volunteers using your roster.** Having accurate attendance ensures all volunteers have signed the waiver and that we can follow up and thank them. It is best if volunteers register online before the cleanup. As volunteers arrive, check them in using your mobile device or a printed version of your roster. Make sure to have some [paper Sign-in Sheets](#) for any walkup volunteers and to print your Check-in QR Code from your cleanup details page at [adopt.greatlakes.org](#).
- **Welcome your volunteers!** Gather everyone together to share a welcome and give instructions.
  - > Share about the Alliance for the Great Lakes and the Adopt-a-Beach program using the Team Leader talking points found at [greatlakes.org/resources](#).
  - > (Optional) Lead a fun warmup activity. Here's an easy example: Have everyone stand in a large circle and have people step into the circle as you ask questions. For instance, if you have visited all five Great Lakes: step into the circle. If you have participated in a cleanup before: step into the circle. It's great to end with: If you drink Great Lakes water: step into the circle. Everyone should be in the circle!
- **Important! Share instructions.**
  - ❑ **Safety.** Stress personal safety with your volunteers.
    - > DO NOT touch suspicious looking materials or sharp objects such as syringes or needles. Leave them where they are found and contact the authorities or landowner, if necessary, to help remove them safely.
    - > DO NOT pick up dead animals. Leave them where they were found.
    - > If you are working with children, tell them to find an adult if they find anything they are unsure about.
  - ❑ **Work in groups.**
    - > Create groups of 2-4 people. Designate one group member as the Data Recorder. This person is responsible for filling in the data card or recording litter on their mobile device. Other team members pick up litter and call out what they find to the data recorder before the trash is put into the group's trash bag or bucket.





## ... Getting Started

- **Hand out supplies.**
  - > Each group receives one data card (if they are not recording litter data on their mobile device), one pencil, one garbage bucket or bag, and one glove for each person
  - > If your site offers recycling, hand out two different colored bags or buckets and have volunteers keep recyclables in a separate container.
- **Remind volunteers** to start cleaning at the farthest point and work their way back to the registration site. Trash bags will be heavy by the end of the cleanup! If you have assigned groups to specific areas of the beach, let them know how to find their assigned area.
- **Set a return time.** Give volunteers a specific time to return to the welcome area. Allow at least 15 minutes to tally results from paper data cards, weigh trash and recyclables, and to thank your volunteers!



## Clean Up!

- **Have fun!** Cheer on your volunteers and answer questions they may have as they work hard to clean up the beach.
- **Take lots of pictures!**

**1**  **WORK IN GROUPS OF 2-4**

**2** **ONE PERSON IS THE OFFICIAL RECORDER** 

of the group using the data card or their mobile device to mark off items as they are picked up by the other group members (volunteers wear gloves)

**3** **ADD UP ITEMS** for each item collected 

**4**  **WEIGH TRASH**

**5** **RECYCLE WHEN YOU CAN** 



## Event Wrap-Up

### Before your volunteers leave...

- **Check data entry** (This will make your job of tallying results for the entire event a breeze!)
  - Be sure each item picked up has been added up on any paper data cards.
  - Total number of people working on each paper data card is noted.
  - Total pounds of trash removed is noted on each paper data card.
  - Confirm any volunteers who collected litter data on a mobile device submitted their final tallies.
- **Thank your amazing volunteers!** Make your volunteers feel appreciated! Thank everyone for coming, pass out stickers (let us know if you need more!) and let them know you'll be in touch soon with a summary of your cleanup data.)

**GREAT WORK!**  
Just a few more steps to finish up a successful cleanup.





## Enter your cleanup data results at [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org).

- Log into your account and go to “My Cleanups”
- Submit your attendance, enter litter data from any paper data cards, and close out your cleanup on the event’s cleanup details page.
- When you close out your cleanup, your volunteers will automatically be emailed a data summary from your cleanup! You will also have the opportunity to add a personalized thank you to your volunteers.
- If you are unable to enter data online, scan and email your attendance and Litter Monitoring Forms to [adoptabeach@greatlakes.org](mailto:adoptabeach@greatlakes.org). You may also mail them to the Alliance’s Chicago office.



## Share your photos and results.

- Post photos from your event on Facebook, X, Instagram or on your own website. Be sure to tag the Alliance for the Great Lakes!
  - > [Facebook.com/AllianceForTheGreatLakes](https://www.facebook.com/AllianceForTheGreatLakes)
  - > X: [@A4GL](https://twitter.com/A4GL)
  - > Instagram: [@Alliance4GreatLakes](https://www.instagram.com/Alliance4GreatLakes)



## Special note for educators

The *Great Lakes in My World* curriculum is an amazing resource available to educators. Explore the curriculum and find more details at [greatlakes.org/education](https://greatlakes.org/education). For help planning a classroom Adopt-a-Beach cleanup, email us at [adoptabeach@greatlakes.org](mailto:adoptabeach@greatlakes.org).



**GIVE YOURSELF A HAND!**  
You have successfully completed your Adopt-a-Beach™ event. You're the best!



## PROTECTING WATER, SUSTAINING LIFE

The Alliance for the Great Lakes is a nonpartisan nonprofit working across the region to protect our most precious resource: the fresh, clean, and natural waters of the Great Lakes. Learn more at [greatlakes.org](https://greatlakes.org).



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