



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 [greatlakes.org/get-involved/adopt-a-beach/](https://greatlakes.org/get-involved/adopt-a-beach/) 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).

- **Decide** if your event is public or private.
  - > **Public events** are open to anyone who is looking for a cleanup in your area. Registering your events on [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org) ensures that we can get in touch with you about your project. And volunteers will be able to connect directly with you.
  - > **Private events** are for an invite only group of volunteers, such as a school group, business or civic group day of service, etc.
- **Help researchers** understand the sources and impacts of pollution. Registering your event and submitting data provides valuable information to the Alliance for the Great Lakes and our partner organizations. Not only does your cleanup event help your local beach, your data helps us develop solutions to pollution problems around the lakes.
- **Communicate with your volunteers.** Registering your event on [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org) ensures that we can get in touch with you about your project. And volunteers will be able to connect directly with you.



## 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.
- **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.





## Get the word out and recruit volunteers for your event.

- **Share your event** through Facebook and social media. For public events, you can share the link for your event from [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org).
- **Check out the sample press release and poster** on the Team Leader resources page at [greatlakes.org/get-involved/adopt-a-beach/team-leader-resources/](https://greatlakes.org/get-involved/adopt-a-beach/team-leader-resources/).



## 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.)
- Volunteer Sign-In Sheets (The sign-in sheet also acts a liability waiver.)
- 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.
- Container for sharp items. (*Easy DIY sharps container*: Use an empty soda bottle with a lid.)

### Optional (but handy!) items:

- Calculator
- Camera. (Or cell phone with camera function.) Photos are great!
- Clipboards. (*Easy DIY clipboards*: Cut hard cardboard the size of a clipboard and adhere a binder clip to the board.)
- Create a sieve for small items. (*Easy DIY sieve*: Cut off the bottom of a plastic milk jug and put holes around the top.)
- Posters or signs to event gathering area.
- Registration table (A folding table is handy. Or, if your park has picnic tables, they make a great registration spot.)
- If you are at a large beach and are planning to assign sections to groups of volunteers, you will need to bring a way to mark those sections (e.g. broom handles, flags, etc.)

### For public events:

- Print a roster and see a list of registrants on the cleanup details page of your cleanup at [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org).





## 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...

- **Check in volunteers using your roster. *This is important!*** Having an accurate roster ensures that volunteers have signed the waiver and that we can follow up and thank them. It is best if volunteers register online before the cleanup. Then you can check them in using your mobile device or tablet at [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org). If electronic signup is unavailable, download paper sign-in sheets from the **Team Leader resources page**.
- **Get to know your volunteers! *(Optional)*** Fun pre-event activity ideas include:
  - > 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!
  - > If you have data from previous cleanups, you can include it in your activity.
- **Volunteer instructions. *(Important!)*** Gather everyone together to give instructions and safety tips.
  - **Safety.** Stress personal safety with your volunteers.
    - > DO NOT touch suspicious looking materials: syringe/needles, etc. If a syringe or other sharp object is found, adults may place them in the sharps container.
    - > DO NOT pick up dead animals. Leave them where they were found.
    - > If you are working with children, tell them not to pick up things they are unsure of. Tell them to find an adult.
  - **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. Other team members pick up the debris and call out what they find to the data recorder before the trash is put into the group's trash bag or bucket. If your site offers recycling, hand out two different colored bags or buckets and have volunteers keep recyclables in a separate container.





## ... Getting Started

- **Hand out supplies.**
  - > Each group receives one data card, one pencil, one garbage bucket or bag (or two if you provide a recycling container), and one glove for each person picking up debris.
- **Remind** volunteers to start cleaning up at the farthest point of the clean up site and to work their way back to the registration site. The trash bags are going to 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 the area they are assigned to clean up.
- **Ask volunteers to return 15 minutes before the event end time.** It will allow time to tally up results and weigh trash and recyclables.



## 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 form 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 sheets** (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 the sheet.
  - ☐ Total number of people working on that sheet is noted.
  - ☐ Total pounds of trash removed is noted on the sheet.
- **Thank your amazing volunteers!**  
It is important to make sure that your volunteers feel appreciated as soon as your event is over. We will follow up and thank them on your behalf a few days after your event.

**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
- Go to “My Cleanups”
- Submit your attendance and litter data on the event’s Cleanup Details page. If you are unable to do this, email these documents to [adoptabeach@greatlakes.org](mailto:adoptabeach@greatlakes.org) or mail them to the Alliance’s Chicago office. The mailing address is on the sign-in sheet.



## Share your photos and results.

- Post photos from your event on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or on your own website. Tag with **#AdoptABeach**
- Share events on our social media channels:
  - > [Facebook.com/AllianceForTheGreatLakes](https://Facebook.com/AllianceForTheGreatLakes)
  - > Twitter: @A4GL
  - > Instagram: @Alliance4GreatLakes



## Special note for educators

The Great Lakes in My World curriculum is an amazing resource available to educators. More details about our curriculum can be found at [greatlakes.org/get-involved/adopt-a-beach/for-your-classroom/](https://greatlakes.org/get-involved/adopt-a-beach/for-your-classroom/). For help planning a classroom Adopt-a-Beach cleanup, email us at [education@greatlakes.org](mailto:education@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).

