

Guidance for Volunteer Litter Pickers

Introduction

Individuals and groups acting as volunteer litter pickers can be exposed to a number of easily avoidable hazards. This guidance has been produced to help volunteers identify these hazards, making their involvement safe and enjoyable, and should be followed by all volunteers. While this guidance has been written primarily for volunteers organising litter picks with the assistance of the Council, the contents are applicable to all volunteer litter pickers in the Cherwell District.

Contact the Council about any of the items raised in this guidance.

Protective Clothing and Equipment

The following items should be used at all times by volunteers undertaking litter picks:

- Reflective hi-visibility waistcoats to clearly highlight volunteers to traffic and pedestrians.
- Litter pickers to avoid direct contact with litter and repetitive bending.
- Gloves to minimise contact with and noxious or dangerous materials.
- Suitable footwear and clothing
- Reflective hi-visibility waistcoats and litter pickers can be provided by the Council, subject to budgetary provision and availability.

Noxious and Dangerous Materials

The following materials may be encountered during litter picks and should be treated with caution:
Broken glass – Remove using a litter picker or a brush and shovel, avoiding contact by hand, and dispose of in a sturdy container.

Drug related litter/hypodermics – These should not be moved under any circumstance. Note the location and report to the Council for specialist removal.

Suspect materials and fly tipping – Items that are possibly dangerous such as unknown liquids in containers, building materials, asbestos, or fly tipping should not be moved by volunteers. Note the location and report to the Council for specialist removal.

If there is any doubt about an item, leave it, and let the Council know.

General Site Safety and Inspection

Litter picking of areas beside roads should be carried out with extreme caution, due to the risk of being struck by vehicles. Litter picking should be restricted to only where there are wide verges or pavements, suitable for pedestrians, and should be carried out facing oncoming traffic. It is essential that volunteers are visible to road users, for that reason, hi-visibility waistcoats must be worn and litter picks should only take place in clear daylight. Volunteers should not attempt to clear litter from the carriageway.

Avoid reaching into hedges or undergrowth in such a way as to expose the face, eyes and skin to scratches from thorns or branches. If an item of litter cannot be safely reached with a litter picker, leave it.

Avoid working close to rivers or on steep slopes, as there is an increased risk of slips and falls. When working close to ditches, avoid reaching into the ditch to remove litter, unless it can be safely reached with a litter picker.

Be mindful of wildlife. In the spring time avoid disturbing animals and birds that may be nesting and in the summer time be wary of wasp and bee nests.

Do not enter an area, or attempt to litter pick an area, where works are restricted, are already taking place (for example road works) or where the public do not have a right to entry. Do not enter private land or property to remove litter.

The level of risk will vary at each location, so prior to commencing a litter pick, it is recommended that a visual site inspection and risk assessment is carried out to establish the above risks and to identify and note other possible hazards. Volunteers have a duty towards themselves, fellow volunteers and the public to work safely. If there is any doubt about the safety of a site or material, then it should be avoided.

Lifting and Handling Materials

Volunteers should be aware of the risk of injury by carrying bags of collected litter and attempting to lift and carry heavy materials. To avoid injury, the following basic principles of manual handling should be applied:

- Use litter pickers to prevent constant bending and stretching.
- Make sure an item is safe to handle with no sharp edges or noxious contents.
- Decide if an item can be safely moved either by one or two people.
- Only try to move an item if this can be done so without straining.
- When lifting an item, move one foot forward to provide a firm base, bend the knees and keep the back in a natural line.

Young Volunteers

While it is beneficial to get young people involved in litter picks, age plays a big part in the ability to recognise and avoid risk. Accordingly, volunteers under the age of 18 should be supervised by an adult and permission for their participation should be gained from a parent or guardian. In the interest of safeguarding children, adults supervising or working with volunteers under the age of 18 should be Criminal Record Bureau checked.

Collection and Disposal of Litter

Volunteers are asked to re-use supermarket carrier bags, or similar, to collect litter, as this does not involve an additional cost to supply bags and it is environmentally friendly to re-use these bags. It also ensures that the volumes of litter collected are manageable to handle.

Volunteers are not expected to separate recyclable items of litter, but if they are willing to do so this, it would be welcomed.

For one-off litter picks, where larger quantities of litter are likely to be collected, please contact the Council's Street Cleansing Department in advance to arrange this.

Disclaimer

Volunteers should not participate in litter picks unless they understand and accept that participation is entirely at their own risk. Volunteers are not working for, or on behalf of, Cherwell District Council, nor Sibford Gower Parish Council,

therefore the Council will not be held responsible for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused as a result of the actions and omissions of volunteers or this guidance.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I borrow litter picking equipment from the Council?

Yes, by arrangement. The Council has litter pickers and hi-visibility waistcoats available for residents and organisations to borrow. Please contact the Council's Street Cleansing Department if you would like to use this equipment.

Why does the Council not provide gloves and bags for litter picking?

The Council can provide bags as a one-off, but due to cost implications it is not sustainable for the Council to continuously provide bags to those carrying out regular litter picks.

Am I insured by the Council when litter picking?

No. Volunteer litter pickers are not working for, or on behalf of, Cherwell District Council, therefore you are not covered by the Council's insurance. If you are representing an organisation, check that you are covered by the organisation's insurance.

What is the difference between litter and fly tipping?

There is no clear definition of the difference between litter and fly tipping. Litter is generally considered to be waste associated with eating, drinking and smoking, which has been improperly discarded and left by members of the public, or waste that is spilt during business operations. Fly tipping is controlled waste (household, commercial, industrial or clinical waste) which has been dumped illegally rather than being disposed of correctly. Fly tipping should not be moved by volunteers.

Can I leave litter pick bags next to my wheeled bin for collection?

No. It is the Council's policy not to accept side waste next to wheeled bins, so any bags you leave next to your bin will not be collected. Either put the bags in a pre-arranged place for collection by the Council's Street Cleansing Department or take them to your local Household Waste and Recycling Centre.

What do I do if I find evidence of where litter may have come from or witness someone dropping litter?

Please report this information to the Council's Environmental Protection Team, who will follow up your report, and will take action depending on the strength of the evidence available.