

Cleanups with Compassion

A Best Practice Guide
for planning
volunteer cleanups
near and with
unhoused neighbors

BEFORE a Cleanup – What to Do

Site Scouting

When: 1 month ahead, and again 1 week ahead

- Are there safety hazards from trash? Examples: syringes, heavy or sharp objects, toxic materials
- Are there environmental hazards? Examples: poison oak, bees, steep trails, slippery areas
- Could new hazards appear before cleanup day (e.g., rain = mud)?
- Are there active encampments near your site?
 - Introduce yourself; clarify you are not code enforcement
 - Ask about their preferred involvement (no contact, full participation, etc.)
 - Ask about materials they prefer you avoid
 - Coordinate with trusted groups to help approach encampment residents
- Can volunteers safely access trash areas (e.g., slope vs. flat ground)?
- Plan your trash hauling route — is there a clear access path?
- Is there adequate parking for staff and volunteers?

Prior Notice

Notify the following groups at least 2–4 weeks ahead of the event:

Group	How to Notify	Notes
Encampment Residents	Flyers, in-person	Offer options for participation, trash drop-off, dumpster use



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Landowners (public/private)	Email or call	Get written permission if needed
Homeless Service Providers	Email or call	May help with outreach
Waste Management	Email or call	Coordinate trash pickup/dumpster
Volunteer Groups	Email	Include time, place, and safety protocols
Water Agencies & County	Email or call	If applicable (floodplains, county reporting)

- Flyers can be handed out and posted at visible locations
- Ask encampment outreach groups (e.g., [SOS Richmond](#), [Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful](#)) about best timing for notices

Risk Management

- Who owns the land where the cleanup will take place?
- Who owns the tools and supplies?
- Who holds liability for volunteers?
- Who will collect and store signed waivers?



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Trash Removal Coordination

Choose your method and coordinate early:

1. Bag it up, load it up, and haul it to the dump yourself. Sometimes, agencies and organizations have an agreement or contract with the dump for low-cost services for dumping waste collected during cleanups. Contact your local landfill or transfer station for details.
2. If you are a nonprofit, sometimes you can work with your city or county and have them coordinate pickup by their staff. In that case, you leave the trash you collect bagged up in a designated location and city or county folks will come pick it up and take it away for you.
3. The easiest, but least common, is having a contract or agreement with your waste services provider for their trucks to pick up the collected trash from your sites for you. No middle people involved. You simply let them know a week or two ahead of time where you will be doing a cleanup, and they will give you a location nearby where their trucks can do a pickup. You simply leave your bagged up trash in the designated location and their trucks will pick it up.

Event Planning

Time Considerations:

- 9am–12pm works well for volunteers
- 11am is often better for encampment residents
- Avoid early morning, extreme heat, and rainy conditions
- Plan around first flush to avoid inaccessible streambeds

Who's Invited:

- Public: volunteers, schools, local groups
- Provide environmental education content if possible
- Encampment Residents
- Outreach staff with training