



Guidance for litter picking volunteers

Introduction

Individuals and groups acting as litter picking volunteers 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.

To contact us about any of the items raised in this guidance, please call 01284 763233 or email customer.services@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Protective clothing and equipment

Volunteers undertaking litter picks should, at all times:

- wear reflective hi-visibility waistcoats to clearly highlight volunteers to traffic and pedestrians (those provided are only appropriate for areas where the speed limit is 30mph or less)
- avoid direct contact with litter and repetitive bending
- wear gloves to minimise contact with any noxious or dangerous materials
- wear suitable footwear and clothing (flip flops or other open-toe footwear are not recommended).

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 and hypodermics** – these should not be moved – note the location and report it to us for specialist removal
- **other** – items that are possibly dangerous, including unknown liquids in containers, building materials or asbestos, should not be moved by volunteers – note the location and report it to us for specialist removal.

If you are in any doubt about an item, please leave it where it is and let us know (only items on publicly accessible land).

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. A pre-site inspection should determine an agreed safe working area. Litter picking should be restricted to areas where there are wide verges or pavements suitable for pedestrians and always carried out facing oncoming traffic. It is essential that you are visible to road users. For that reason, you must wear hi-visibility waistcoats and litter picks should only take place in daylight and good visibility. Do not attempt to clear litter from the carriageway itself.

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, please leave it and report to us.

Avoid working close to rivers, slippery surfaces or on steep sloping ground 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 and avoid disturbing nesting birds and insects such as bees and wasps.

Do not enter or attempt to litter pick areas where there are restrictions in place such as road works or construction projects or where the public do not have a right to enter.

The level of risk will vary at each location. Prior to commencing a litter pick, it is recommended that a visual site inspection and risk assessment be carried out to identify the above risks and other potential hazards. You have a duty to yourself, fellow volunteers and the wider public to work safely. If there is any doubt about the safety of a location or the materials present, it should be avoided. A dynamic 'on the spot' assessment can take place for new or changing risks which may occur.

Lifting and handling materials

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

- 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 whether an item can be safely moved by either one or two people
- only try to move an item if this can be done without straining
- when lifting an item, bend the legs and keep the back straight.

Young volunteers

While it is extremely beneficial to get young people involved in litter picking, age plays a big part in the ability to recognise and avoid risk. Accordingly, a parent or guardian should supervise anyone taking part who is under 18 years old. If a parent or guardian is not involved in the activity, they will need to nominate a suitable adult and give their permission for the child to take part.

Collection and disposal of litter

Whenever possible, please take home any litter collected and place it in your wheeled bin. If you don't have space, and provided the waste is in West Suffolk Council branded sacks, please leave it next to your bin on your scheduled collection day. If this is not possible, and provided it is in branded sacks, you can leave it next to any council litter bin, where it will be collected the next time the bin is emptied.

Where a larger quantity of litter is being collected as part of an organised event, we can arrange for its collection. Please contact customer services at West Suffolk Council – email customer.services@westsuffolk.gov.uk or phone 01284 763233.

Recycling

Volunteers are not expected to separate recyclable and non-recyclable items of litter. However, if this is something you wish to do, please use your blue recycling bin at home. Items accepted in the blue bin can be found on the Suffolk Recycles website – Guide to recycling:

[https://suffolkrecycling.org.uk/uploads/guide_to_recycling_2020_\(with_translation_box\).pdf](https://suffolkrecycling.org.uk/uploads/guide_to_recycling_2020_(with_translation_box).pdf)

You can also use our network of bring banks for the disposal of glass and textiles. Recyclable items may also be taken to your local recycling centre – a list of accepted materials and locations can be found on the Suffolk Recycling website – Recycling centres:

<https://suffolkrecycling.org.uk/where-to-recycle/recycling-centres>

Please note that recycling centres do not accept mixed recyclables. Materials must be fully separated prior to arrival.

COVID-19

It is essential that you are aware of, and adhere to, all current Government restrictions in relation to COVID-19.

Disclaimer

You should not participate in litter picks unless you understand and accept that participation is entirely at your own risk. You are not working for, or on behalf of, West Suffolk Council; therefore, we will not be held responsible for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused because of the actions or omissions of volunteers or this guidance.

Public liability insurance

Obtaining public liability insurance is very important and strongly recommended. This will provide cover for your legal liability arising from accidental damage or injury that may occur during the event, including damage or injury to a member of the public or their property. If you are an individual organising a tidy up, your current household insurance may cover you for public liability. You will need to check your policy to ensure you are covered. If not, you will need to take out a separate public liability insurance.

Frequently asked questions

Am I insured by the council when litter picking?

No. You are not working for, or on behalf of, West Suffolk 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?

Although there are no definitive definitions of 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 and can include items such as white goods.