

LITTER PICKING: HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Introduction

This guidance is aimed at assisting voluntary groups who wish to participate in cleaning up the Isle of Man's environment to meet their general duty of care to participants. Those working in a purely voluntary capacity are not at work for the purposes of the Isle of Man's Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and are therefore not covered by the Island's health and safety legislation.

Many environmental and local groups recognise that collecting litter can be a hazardous activity, and this guidance has been prepared by the Health and Safety at Work Inspectorate to give practical information for organisers of litter picking events.

Much of the information will also be useful for those organising litter collection as part of a work activity, but here more thorough attention should be paid to the general duties imposed on employers and employees by sections 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 as applied to the Isle of Man.

2. Selecting a site

Having identified an area in need of a clean up, it is important to visit the site and have a good look round with a view to identifying potential hazards. In particular, organisers should look out for the following:

- a. Busy roads
- b. Fast or deep flowing water
- c. Steep, slippery or unstable banks
- d. Derelict buildings

If an area has too many hazards or has hazards that you are unable to address, you should look for another site.

3. Getting prepared

You will need to make a number of arrangements and obtain the right equipment before the day of your clean up. The list of items below should form a helpful starting point.

- a. Personal safety items: heavy duty waterproof gloves, litter pickers, rakes and shovels will all help volunteers pick up litter without exposing themselves to cuts or needle stick injuries and will reduce the risk of back strain.

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- b. Collecting equipment: you will need supplies of refuse sacks and string or tape for sealing them. In addition, you will need to have at hand a sharps bin or similar container for glass and the like.
- c. Local Authority operatives on the Isle of Man are used to dealing with hypodermic needles, drugs related litter and hazardous materials. Under no circumstances should volunteers touch such materials. Instead, ensure you make arrangements for marking such litter and for contacting the Local Authority for specialist removal.
- d. First aid provision: as a minimum, a first aid box including anti-bacterial wipes should be available at each site. For larger events, it is advisable to arrange for at least one volunteer to be a first aider, or to contact one of the voluntary first aid organisations for assistance.
- e. Highway safety: for any site where there is a significant risk of being struck by moving traffic, volunteers should be provided with high visibility clothing. High visibility clothing is essential even on roads that are not busy if low light levels or poor weather restrict visibility.
- f. Children: most sites will pose some danger to children. Young people over 10 years old should be properly supervised: a ratio of no more than five young persons to one adult will be suitable. Organisers are advised not to allow children under 10 years old to participate in litter picking events.
- g. Advice to volunteers. Before the event, potential volunteers should be advised to wear strong, comfortable boots or shoes and to bring warm or waterproof clothing and head gear if poor weather is expected. Volunteers should be advised to make sure that their inoculations against tetanus are up to date and told about any rules you have set down to deal with the issues on this list.
- h. Insurance: although they are not employers, organisers can still be held liable for injuries and accidents to. Obtaining public liability insurance is very important. This will provide cover for any legal liability arising from accidental damage or injury that occurs during the event, including damage or injury to a member of the public or their property. Organisers should ensure that they are either covered by the insurance of another body, or that they have arranged their own event insurance.
- i. Hazardous waste: volunteers may find cans, drums and similar containers during the event. It is not safe to assume that the contents of such containers are as described on the label. If there is any suggestion that the contents may be hazardous or that the container is leaking in any way, the item should not be collected, but be marked as hazardous waste for collection by the Local Authority at a later date. On beaches, especially those with short sea sewage outfalls, volunteers should be aware that there is a high risk of infection from discharged material washed up on the shore, and additional care is advised.

4. On the day

On the day of the event, organisers should turn up well in advance of the planned start time to make a final check of the site and ensure that the plans and arrangements they have put in place are still appropriate.

When volunteers arrive, they should be given a safety briefing on the risks that the work and the site involves and the precautions that are appropriate, especially in relation on how to deal with hazardous materials. Check that everyone has understood and that they are properly equipped.

Make sure that you identify a site for the storage of the collected rubbish and that you have arranged for this to be collected.

5. Conclusions

The vast bulk of litter to be found on the Isle of Man poses very little threat to litter pickers: however, litter picking can involve both hidden and obvious dangers, and organisers are urged to plan for health and safety in advance of the event to ensure that the maximum benefit can be achieved for the environment with the minimum of risk to individuals.

6. Getting further help

Further guidance on health and safety issues is available from the Health and Safety at Work Inspectorate, 23 Athol Street, Douglas, IM1 1LV, telephone 685952 or email WorkSafe@dlge.gov.im.

Employers who are involved in litter collection activities or who are asking employees to volunteer for such work during work time should be aware that they are subject to the requirements of health and safety legislation. In general terms, this requires employers to reduce risks to the lowest level that is reasonably practicable. Options to consider here include the use of sweeping and collecting machinery, the selection and training of specialist staff and the use of medical supervision and inoculation programmes. The use of risk assessment techniques is recommended.

This information document is current at April 2002 and is issued to assist voluntary groups undertake litter picking activities safely. It does not replace any other guidance, affect any existing enforcement procedures, nor does it present a full summary of the requirements imposed upon employers and the self-employed.