

Queen's Park Trust

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Canal Debris Removal Risk Assessment

Canal debris removal is not for volunteers under 18 years of age

Safe canal debris removal requires the right tools and strict safety rules. Never step on unstable banks. Wear waterproof gear and gloves to avoid cuts from hidden glass or metal. Always follow local environmental rules to protect wildlife and water quality. Always take first aid kit, mobile phone and safety line when doing volunteering.

Safety Gear and Preparation

- **Wear Gloves:** Protect your hands from sharp trash or jagged wood.
- **Wear Boots:** Use thick, non-slip, waterproof boots to keep your feet safe.
- **Work in Teams:** Always have at least one partner with you in case you slip.
- **Use Hand Tools:** Use long-handled rakes or grabbers to reach items safely from the bank.

Removing Vegetation

- Cut small vines and dead branches on the bank edge.
- Use ropes to tie up loose branches so they do not float away and block the water.
- Do not dump cut plants into the water. This can block light and lower oxygen for fish.

Handling Large Debris

- Heavy items (tires, bikes, or large logs) need machines.
- Never try to pull heavy debris by hand. You can hurt your back or fall into the water.
- Do not leave pulled items on the towpath. This creates a trip hazard.

Disposing of Waste

- Put all collected trash in proper bins.
- Take hazardous items (like old batteries or paints) to special local waste centres.

- Report large, dumped items or pollution to local authorities like the [Canal & River Trust](#).

Using a litter net on a canal means keeping yourself stable, protecting wildlife, and avoiding snags. Attach your net to a long, extendable pole (like a broom handle) so you can reach the water safely from the towpath. Always stay balanced, wear grippy shoes, and avoid leaning too far over the edge.

Steps for Safe Use

- **Inspect the edges:** The canal wall can be slippery. Check that your footing is solid before you reach out.
- **Watch for boats:** Boat propellers create waves called wash. Pull your net out of the water when boats pass.
- **Avoid wildlife:** Look closely before sweeping. Canals are home to swans, ducks, and fish. Keep your net away from them so they do not get tangled.
- **Know your weight:** Water-logged trash is very heavy. Pull the pole in hand-over-hand rather than trying to lift a full net straight up with the pole fully extended.

Proper Disposal

- **Sort it out:** If you pull out something you can recycle, put it in a proper bin. Use the [Canal & River Trust](#) facilities if you are boating or use local street bins.
- **Never leave bags:** Do not leave piles of trash bags next to the bins. This invites animals to break them open and makes a larger mess.

Using a litter net (or magnet) on a canal requires careful positioning to avoid slipping or falling into the water.

Foot Placement and Stance

- **Step back:** Stay at least one step away from the water's edge.
- **Wide stance:** Keep your feet shoulder-width apart for optimal balance.
- **Parallel alignment:** Position your feet parallel to the canal edge, not pointing towards it.
- **Perpendicular alternative:** Place one foot forward and one foot back if you need to lean.
- **Shift weight:** Keep your body weight cantered or slightly leaning backward away from the water.
- **Stable ground:** Stand only on flat, dry, concrete, or paved surfaces.
- **Avoid grass:** Never stand on muddy, grassy, or weed-covered slopes.

Safe Netting Technique

- **Use extensions:** Use a net with a long, telescopic handle to extend your reach.
- **Do not overreach:** If an item is too far, leave it or move to a closer position.
- **Leverage the wall:** Rest the handle against the canal wall for stability if lifting heavy items.
- **Two hands:** Always keep both hands securely on the handle.
- **Brace yourself:** Expect sudden weight changes if the net catches on underwater debris.

General Canal Safety

- **Check the edge:** Look out for crumbling masonry or slippery moss before stepping near the canal.
- **Wear footwear:** Use sturdy, closed-toe shoes with excellent grip.
- **Work in pairs:** Never go litter picking by a canal alone.