

Queen's Park Trust

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Litter Pick Risk Assessment

All volunteers should be given a briefing Safety Talk, covering the above risks and general information about correct use of the equipment and the site. If you haven't received one, ask your Group Leader before starting the task.

In hot weather there is a risk of sunburn, you should wear a hat, long sleeves and sunblock. Group leaders should consider suspending the work if it gets too hot so do inform them if you are struggling with the heat and the activity could be ended or delayed for a cooler time of day.

During cold or wet weather wear warm layers and waterproof clothing with thick socks and sturdy boots or shoes. Let the Group Leader know if the weather seems sufficiently extreme so they can consider suspending the activity.

There should be a First Aider on site with access to a First Aid travel bag in the case of accidents especially, cuts and graze, stings or bites from vegetation or insects. So do let the Group Leader know of any incidents.

There should be no unprotected feet – wear sturdy shoes, boots or trainers. Wear suitable clothing.

Gloves are to be worn at all times and litter pick claws to be used for picking up litter, never use a bare hand to pick litter or hold the rubbish bags. For hygiene purposes and visibility safety, have long hair tied back.

QPT needs to undertake an onsite review of the area to be cleaned, identify any hazards and brief volunteers in advance of the day or on the day.

Walk carefully avoiding trips, slips and falls as much as is practicable. Be wary of uneven ground and trip hazards including trailing vegetation. Wear supportive and slip-resistant footwear and take care when negotiating property steps.

- Don't reach into any areas that you cannot see clearly
- Don't touch sharp items such as glass, or any bulky items which are too heavy to lift
- Don't handle any sharps, needles, dead animals or dog poo
- Don't take any risks

Observe the ground and stay aware of potential trip hazards. If in doubt don't carry on if an area looks slippery or dangerous. Consider if the environment is slippery from rain, leaves, ice, snow, etc.

Be careful on or near roads. Always focus when crossing streets and be aware of surroundings at all times. Be aware of cars, potentially trying to park, maintain vigilance, give warning to others of approaching vehicles and check for any unusual hazards on the day. Do not pick litter from the road but remain on pavements and paths.

Volunteers finding syringes or medical waste should not touch them but immediately notify the Group Leader who will arrange disposal via the local authority. All work must then cease in this particular area. Any accidental piercing by syringe should be immediately treated at A & E. Remain vigilant at all times during the clean-up and end the clean-up immediately in this area if syringes are found.

Volunteers need to be aware of their own limitations and not lift heavy items found during the clean-up. Volunteers with pre-existing injuries or physical conditions are not to lift bags or heavy items. No more than one filled bag at a time to be carried. A trolley to be used where bags or other items are too heavy to lift safely.

Do not touch dog fouling. If you step in dog faeces, clean shoes if possible. If found warn others in the vicinity.

Any suspicious drums, materials or containers with contents not identifiable to be left untouched and reported to the Group Leader to inform the local council.

Avoid areas if any evidence of aggressive dogs and maintain vigilance for dogs off leads. Let the Group Leader and others know if you come across either an aggressive dog or any dog off the lead. Adopt this recommended posture if confronted by a dog – do not look in their eyes, look down, do not run, pull limbs into your body, retreat slowly. Visit A&E if bitten or attacked and report attack to the Police.

If any other individuals, not part of the activity, ask you to come with them or they follow you, immediately return to where your Group Leader is and advise others to also. Tell the Group Leader your concerns and end the activity immediately.

Litter Picks on the Canal Towpath

A canal towpath litter-picking risk assessment must mitigate risks from water proximity, towpath traffic, sharp items, and biological hazards. Key controls include avoiding the water's edge, wearing puncture-resistant gloves and sturdy footwear, using grabber tools to avoid touching hazardous waste, and staying aware of cyclists.

Key Hazards & Control Measures

- **Water Safety & Slips:** Deep water, silt, and wet surfaces pose severe drowning and slipping hazards. Stay well back from the water's edge. Do not attempt to retrieve items from the water or climb down steep embankments.
- **Sharps & Biohazards:** Broken glass, discarded needles, and dog fouling present serious infection and injury risks. Always use a litter picker. Never pick up sharp objects, medical waste, or dead animals with your hands. Report hazardous items rather than handling them yourself.
- **Towpath Traffic:** Canals are shared spaces. High-speed cyclists, dog walkers, and other pedestrians can cause collisions. Wear high-visibility vests. Be mindful of other users and do not leave rubbish bags as a tripping hazard across the path.
- **Weather & Environmental:** Extreme sun, rain, or overgrown vegetation (thistles, stinging nettles, ticks) are common. Wear layers suitable for the weather and long sleeves/trousers to protect against vegetation and ticks. Postpone in extreme weather.
- **Hygiene:** Always wash and sanitise hands thoroughly immediately after the litter pick and before eating or drinking.
- **Briefing:** Provide a mandatory safety briefing to all volunteers before starting, ensuring everyone understands the designated route and hazard areas.

Swans and other big birds on the towpath

When encountering a swan on a towpath, the primary hazards are physical injury from defensive attacks (swans have powerful wings and necks) and slip, trip, or fall hazards into the water. Swans can be highly territorial, especially during the spring and summer nesting and cygnet-rearing seasons.

- **Give a wide berth:** Maintain a safe distance and don't corner or crowd the birds.
- **Do not feed by hand:** Don't feed the birds from the towpath edge, which can attract them into high-traffic areas and cause aggressive conditioning.
- **Do not stop or jump in:** If a swan becomes aggressive, towpath users should move away calmly. Do not corner them and never jump into the water to escape.
- **Temporary diversions:** If an active nest is directly on a narrow towpath, consider a temporary rerouting to avoid conflict.
- **Keep away from the edge:** Stepping backward or rushing to avoid a swan can result in slipping into the water or being cut by sharp debris. Always be calm and stay aware of your surroundings especially around foot placement.

For comprehensive guides, you can review the [Canal & River Trust Plastics Challenge Guide](#) or the [Inland Waterways Association Toolbox Talk](#).