

Beach clean organiser guide





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Thanks for becoming a beach clean organiser!

Beachwatch is a beach clean and litter recording programme set up to tackle beach litter and help stop rubbish polluting our ocean. Our survey data is used for international scientific research and to campaign for positive change.

Some beach clean basics

Please follow our latest beach clean safety guidance which you can find on your volunteer dashboard online under 'guides and resources'.

Carrying out a Marine Conservation Society beach clean is simple – you and your volunteers clean up litter and record on survey forms what you find along a 100m stretch of your chosen beach, from the strandline (the line the tide last reached) to the back part of the beach.

We only ask you to survey 100m because 90% of all litter types will almost certainly be found over that length and regular surveys over time in a set area will clearly indicate litter trends. You can of course carry on cleaning as much of the beach as you like in the time you have on the day.

Marine Conservation Society volunteers organise, and take part in, Beachwatch events all year round.

You can clean up as often as you like – but ideally we need a set of results for each 100m beach stretch at least once a season.

The Great British Beach Clean

The Great British Beach Clean Our flagship Beachwatch event takes place over 10 days from the third weekend of September.

Data collected during the Great British Beach Clean, Great Northern Ireland Beach Clean and Great Channel Islands Beach Clean is part of the annual International Coastal Clean-up.

Hundreds of thousands of people clean beaches all over the world at the same time to give a global beach litter snapshot. We also publish our UK engagement figures afterwards and all that information is reported in the State of Our Beaches Report, launched in the following Spring.



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Simple steps to a stress-free event

Getting started – [register as a Marine Conservation Society volunteer](#).

Once you are set up and logged in, you will be able to access your volunteer portal where you can manage all your activity. Click on the 'Organise a beach clean' and this will take you through four simple steps to get your event organised.

Here you can set your location, date and time, and add details about the event. You'll also find tips for running a successful event – such as notifying the landowner, filling in a risk assessment and checking that you have all you need for the day.

We provide guidance and templates to help you through every step.



Step 1

Select your location

Choose a 100m stretch of beach to survey, using the 'Find a location' search. The map will show all the 100m stretches available in your area, so you can select the right one.

You'll also be able to see when beach stretches were last cleaned – or if another beach clean is planned soon – so that you can choose the best time for your clean.

If you can't find the 100m stretch you were looking for, then there is an option to [submit a new one](#). This will be reviewed by the team and approved if there are no concerns (usually within 2 working days).

Step 2

Set a date and time for your event

Set a date to fit in with the tides. Ideally you want to be starting your beach clean at low tide, or about 2 hours after high tide. You can find tide times here [Sea Tempteratu.re](#).

Step 3

Set up your beach clean event page

This is where you can add useful details about your beach clean, so volunteers can find out everything they need to know and sign up to the event.

Events can be private if you'd prefer, which means they won't show on the website but our team will still be able to see they're happening.

You can invite people to sign up to the private event by copying and pasting the page url (which you'll see in the website address bar at the top of the page) and sending this to them directly.

Remember: in order to be able to view private events using the link people must have already created a Marine Conservation Society volunteer account on the website and be signed in.

Step 4

Summary and logistics

You're nearly set! All that's left to do is complete a risk assessment – we've provided a helpful template that you can download. Make sure you get permission from whoever owns the beach.

Go to the beach clean resources section under 'guides and resources' on your volunteer dashboard to find a template to use.

When getting permission, ask what the owner would like you to do if you find needles and syringes.

At any point in the process you can save your event as a draft, and return to it later. You'll find all your events – including saved drafts – on your volunteer portal.

Once you have permission from the landowner you can submit the event for us to approve. A member of our team will get in touch if they have any questions.

Not sure who the owner is? Ring the local council – it's almost certainly them but if it's privately owned they'll know who by and pass their details to you. You can also ask at the local beach shop or café.

Some owners need a copy of our insurance to give permission.



How to ensure you are covered by our insurance

Organisers must make time for appropriate planning and complete a risk assessment prior to their event.

They also need to provide health and safety briefings before the cleans and get consent from parents/guardians for under 16s taking part in the clean. An automatic email will be sent to your volunteers to let them know the event has been cancelled.

Please include anything you encountered during your clean that was unsafe or hazardous **in the box** on the litter survey form. This will help us review and make it safer for everyone in the future.

If there were any injuries, incidents, or near misses during your clean—whether involving yourself or any participants—please report this to the Marine Conservation Society **as soon as possible**, either by:

- Emailing: concerns@mcsuk.org
- Calling: 01989 566017

Our template risk assessment and Public Liability Insurance can be found in our [guides and resources page](#) on our website.

Cancelling your event

You can cancel your event at any time by clicking on the 'cancel' link on your event page.

An automatic email will be sent to your volunteers to let them know the event has been cancelled.

Organising your beach clean

How to collect survey data on the day

Our [paper survey forms](#) can be found in the 'guides and resources' section of our website. Simply collect the forms at the end of the clean and you can submit the survey data once you are back in front of your computer along with your final observations. It can help to add everything up on our [summary form](#) before submitting your data.

Our optional sources list shows you where the litter you find on the beach comes from. It can also help with categorising what you find.

Our paper survey forms can be found on the guides and resources section of our website. We also have an optional [photo id crib sheet](#) to help you identify tricky litter items.

Forms you'll need to take on the day

- The risk assessment template can be found when going through the four-step event organisation process, but you can also find it in the beach clean resources.
- Photo consent form if you want to take photos that you can share.
- Parental consent forms for parent or guardian to sign for anyone under 16. This is to comply with our insurance for young volunteers.



What to take with you if you don't have a Marine Conservation Society equipment pack

First aid kit – similar to the one you may have in the back of your car. Let people know you have one – they can treat themselves so you don't need to be a trained first-aider.

Bucket – to collect sharp objects that will likely cut through a bin liner like glass and metal.

A big roll of bin liners – the heavy duty ones from a DIY store are ideal. If you are recycling rigid plastics, one colour for recycling and one for everything else works well.

Gloves – (if volunteers aren't using a litter picker) ideally ask if volunteers can bring their own or the beach owner may have some for loan.

Litter pickers – the beach owner, especially if it's a council, may have equipment you can borrow. Alternatively, visit [The Helping Hand Company](#), where you will receive a 10% discount on your order using the code MCSGROUP and they will also make a donation to the Marine Conservation Society for each item sold.

Clipboards and pens – again the beach owner may have some you can borrow but they're pretty cheap to buy if you want to start your own stash.

Weighing scales – you can pick up a small set of scales (the ones with a hook make it easy to hang the rubbish bags from) quite cheaply online. Search for a spring hanging balance (sometimes called a newton meter) or a luggage / travel scale.

Wear appropriate clothing – sturdy footwear is a must and outer clothing to suit the British weather. Pack sunscreen if the weather looks good and take a reusable water bottle.

On the day

Arrive in plenty of time and mark out the area. Use a tape measure if you have one but pacing is fine.



TIP – in your garden or along your street measure out 100m then count how many of your steps it takes to cover the distance.

Put gloves and litter pickers in a place where people can pick them up as they arrive.

Here are some pointers to include in your 'welcome' chat

For a more detailed briefing that you can download and take with you, visit the 'guides and resources' section of our website (there's a helpful link in your volunteer portal) and click on 'volunteer briefing'.

Marine litter is unsightly – it's bad for tourism and dangerous for marine creatures which can eat it or become entangled in it.

Plastics are a particular problem – consistently making up over 60% of what's found on beaches.

Plastic never disappears – it just gets smaller and smaller – and easier for marine creatures to eat which means it can move through the food chain potentially ending up on our dinner plates.

The toilets are over there – and you can get a brew at xxxx (find out before your event).

The tides today are – list high tides (which you will have from your event planning).

Timings for the event – when we're going to start and finish.

Please don't touch anything that looks like it might be dangerous or full of something nasty (containers, drums, unexploded shells or syringes). If you're unsure, ask me.

Be careful about lifting heavy or semi-buried objects that could cause a strain injury – if in doubt don't lift!

Syringes and needles must be left where they are and the beach owner will be alerted to remove them afterwards.

We've completed a risk assessment at the beach and here are a few of the hazards we identified. (Read out your list.)

After the litter pick – bags can be weighed (if you have a set of scales). Remind everyone to hand in their paper forms.

Take a group photo to share. Make sure you have everyone's consent (and don't forget to tag us too Instagram @mcs_uk).



Briefing your volunteer group

Give the volunteers a briefing to include an intro to Beachwatch, that it's all about collecting data as well as cleaning, different litter types, where it comes from and how we use the data to raise awareness, influence policymakers and run campaigns to stop litter getting there in the first place.

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Other data

Whilst doing the survey, make a note of the other pieces of information that you will need when submitting your data. Like **how many volunteers you have**, the **wind direction** and **sea conditions**.

We've created a form for you to make it easier – again it's in the 'guides and resources' section on our website.



Explain how to complete the survey

The 100m is marked out – we do 100m because 90% of all litter types will almost certainly be found over that length and regular surveys over time in a set area will clearly indicate litter trends. The survey is from the strandline (the line the tide last reached) to the back part of the beach. Pick up every piece of litter you find over the 100m stretch. When you've done your 100m you can carry on cleaning – but not recording. We ONLY need data from the 100m submitted.

Ideally, work in groups of between three and five: one person to record items on the paper survey form, one to hold the bag and the others to collect the litter. Record every bit of litter on your survey form. Categorise litter based on what the item is mostly made of, ask me or record under 'Other' for that material.

We'd also like to hear about unusual items. Take a picture to share with us if you can.

Don't pick up anything natural – wood is fine to leave if not covered in resins or paints. Some commonly mistaken items are cotton buds and lolly sticks: cotton bud sticks are thinner with notches at the ends! String or fishing net? Net is generally green!

Collect the forms in at the end so you can submit the results when you get back to your computer. During the clean, organisers also need to fill in the 'Beach Clean summary sheet', which records additional observations. You'll be asked for this information when you submit your survey data.



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After the beach clean

Count the bags of rubbish and, if you have a pair of scales, record the weight of all the bags – you will need this when submitting the results.

Take a photo of your volunteers altogether – ideally with the bags they've collected. Make sure everyone has signed the model release form which is downloadable from the volunteer dashboard on the website. You can find this form in the 'guides and resources' section of our website. This gives us permission to use the image for digital and printed publications.

You can post the pic on your own social media networks as a thank you and also send to us at beachwatch@mcsuk.org.

Collect any paper survey sheets so you can input the results at home.

Stack the bags with the rest of the rubbish at the appointed collection point.

Thank everyone on behalf of the Marine Conservation Society for taking part and, if you have a date for your next clean, be sure to let everyone know.

Optionally, why not take a photo of your volunteers altogether – ideally with the bags they've collected. Make sure everyone has signed the model release form which is downloadable from the volunteer page on the website. You can find this form in the 'guides and resources' section of our website. This gives us permission to use the image for digital and printed publications

📷 Liz Bassindale



📷 Billy Barraclough





Submitting your results

When you get home, add up the total numbers for each litter item from all the paper survey sheets and add to the database as one survey summary, together with the other data you collected on the day.

Go to your volunteer portal when logged in to your account on our website. You will see your event – click on this where it says ‘awaiting survey’. You will be taken to the details of the event and on the right hand side there will be an option to ‘add survey data’.

Here you will see the date, of your event . You’ll be asked to add your organiser observations at this point – such as unusual items found, and whether there was a particularly high tide. You can use the ‘Beach clean summary sheet’ to record this information during the clean. Once you have filled in everything, click on ‘submit’ at the bottom (you can cancel your survey too if you need to) and you will be taken to a thank you page with an option to view your submission with a summary of your results, percentage of materials found and where they came from. If you spot any errors, you can click on the ‘edit this survey’ button and save any changes.

Everyone who has attended the event will also be able to see the survey results on their volunteer portal. You can also print or save the survey as a PDF to share.

What if I didn’t have an event set up on your website?

Not a problem – you can still add your data. Go to the ‘your surveys’ section on your volunteer portal. Here, you can click on ‘add a survey’ and you’re taken to find the 100m stretch you would like to add data for using the ‘find a location’ search.

Choose the correct stretch (or request to add a new one) and you will be taken to the next step where you submit your data. Fill everything in and when you are happy, click ‘submit’ at the bottom.

Scan or take a photo of your parental and photo consent forms, and email them to beachwatch@mcsuk.org and we will store them securely. You can then shred your paper copies.

Emergency and important contact information

MARINE
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY



We hope nothing out of the ordinary happens, but here are some useful contacts just in case.

In an emergency call 999 or 112.

Coast or sea – Ask for the Coastguard
Inland, rivers or lakes – Ask for Fire and Rescue

In a medical emergency

Call 999 or 112 – Signs of a heart attack; stroke; severe difficulty breathing; heavy bleeding; severe injury; seizure (fit); unconsciousness; sudden, rapid swelling of the eyes, lips, mouth, throat or tongue.

Nearest defibrillator

heartsafe.org.uk/aed-locations

If you have a **medical problem** and you're not sure what to do call **111** or visit **111.nhs.uk**.

If you're **lost** or need to pinpoint a location use **what3words.com**.

Beachwatch enquiries

01989 567807 or **beachwatch@mcsuk.org**

Hazardous & suspicious items

Never approach suspicious looking containers or items. Leave them untouched and contact:

England: Environment Agency
0800 7312453

Scotland: Scottish Environment Protection Agency **0800 80 70 60**

Wales: Natural Resources Wales
0300 065 3000

Northern Ireland: Environment Agency
0845 302 0008

Syringes

Never put in collecting bags.

For disposal organisers should

contact the local council.

Report at **gov.uk/report-syringes**.

Dead cetaceans

England & Wales: CSIP stranded whale or dolphin hotline **0800 652 0333**

Scotland: Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme **07979 245893**

Northern Ireland: DAERA **028 708 2360**

Injured or stranded marine animals

England, Wales & Scotland: BDMLR
01825 765546 (24hr)

Northern Ireland: DAERA
028 7082 3600 (24hr)

If you find any other live but injured animals call:

England & Wales: RSPCA **0300 1234 999**
Scotland: SSPCA **03000 999 999**

You will receive further advice over the phone. In the meantime, keep people away, and follow this advice whilst you wait for help.

Dolphins, whales and porpoises – Avoid physical contact for their stress levels and your health. Keep the animal cool and wet with seawater avoid getting water down the blowhole. Draping in a damp blanket is good, as long as it doesn't cover the blowhole.

Seals – Regularly come out of the sea to rest and mothers can leave pups on the beach whilst they hunt offshore. Only get help if you think the seal is injured, sick or has been abandoned. Seals bite so keep your distance.

Turtles – Get assistance immediately as every second counts. Do not return the turtle to the water.

Jellyfish – Strand quite regularly and can do so in large numbers. Don't touch as they may sting. Report at **mcsuk.org/sightings**.



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Registered company limited by guarantee in England and Wales 02550966.
Registered office: Overross House, Ross Park, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7US. VAT number: 321491232.

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