

# CLEANUP SAFETY TIPS

It is important to prepare your volunteers for hazards they might encounter at the cleanup site. Below are tips for on and off the water, as well as how to handle various types of materials in your cleanup area. Use of boats is entirely optional and American Rivers recommends the use of professional outfitter if boating. Instruct volunteers that when in doubt notify the organizers and/or team leaders instead of handling materials themselves.

## Protective gear

Protect your group from hazards by encouraging everyone to use:

- Work gloves
- Sturdy shoes with hard soles
- Sunglasses
- Personal floatation device, if boating
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Hand sanitizer

## On-the-water

Safety Guidelines for Boaters:

- Organizers that use motorized boats should follow the applicable governmental regulations and guidelines.
- Always use a personal floatation device (PFD).
- Appoint experienced boaters to be the lead boat (front) and sweep boat (rear) and provide first aid kits for each.

- Ask people to stay behind the lead and in front of the sweep.
- Stay within sight of each other: If you can't see the last boat in the group, slow down or stop.
- No diving or jumping into the water, no deliberate boat tipping, etc.
- Have an emergency plan.
- Appoint at least one person on the water to make decisions in case of an emergency.
- Identify and avoid hazards: Look out for buildups of trees and debris in the water. Also watch for drops, dams and other more difficult river features. Rivers are dynamic and features may have changed since you first scouted for your cleanup.
- Avoid boating on fast-moving rivers or sections of rivers containing any known rapids.
- Steer away from anglers, swimmers and other boaters.

## Handling trash

Garbage can be dirty, rusty, slimy, and sometimes sharp. Use caution when handling trash to avoid cuts and abrasions. Emphasize to everyone: Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't try to lift heavy objects alone. Do not open any containers, including plastic water or soda bottles as they may contain hazardous material.

# CLEANUP SAFETY TIPS (CONT)

## Avoid hazardous materials

If you discover hazardous materials, immediately contact your state's department of environmental and public health, pollution control or like agency, the event organizer should keep a copy of that contact information on-hand. Do not attempt to handle or dispose of hazardous materials on your own. Hazardous materials need to be taken to special processing facilities.

Examples of potentially hazardous materials:

- Drums or containers that may contain toxic waste
- Needles and other biohazard waste
- Weapons, ammunition or explosives. Do not handle! Immediately alert the authorities if these items are discovered during your cleanup.

Handle with caution: broken glass, aerosol cans, gas cans and other containers with chemical residues or traces of volatile materials.

## Practice general outdoor safety

- Be weather wise: Know the signs of changing weather conditions. Cancel event if there is a high probability of lightning or extreme weather in the area.
- Pay attention for outdoor risks: snakes, insects, poisonous plants, other wildlife, etc.
- Use the buddy system.
- Remember to stay hydrated and take breaks.



PHOTO: ITALIA MILLAN

↑ **CLINTON RIVER WATERSHED, MICHIGAN.** Always wear gloves and sturdy shoes to protect yourself from sharp objects and hazards. Clinton Cleanup, September 20, 2019. Rochester, Michigan.