

# THE BIG BEACH CLEAN 2026

A guidance and instruction brochure



[www.cleancoasts.org](http://www.cleancoasts.org)



An Taisce



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**An Taisce's Clean Coasts Programme is proudly sponsored by  
The Government of Ireland and Fáilte Ireland**



**Rialtas na hÉireann**  
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**The Big Beach Clean initiative is sponsored by KIA Ireland.**



# ABOUT THE BIG BEACH CLEAN 2026

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The Big Beach Clean is a Clean Coasts initiative that takes place in September each year, to mark the end of the Irish bathing season (June to September). In 2026, it will run from the **18th to 20th of September**.

Throughout the month of September, and in particular during the Big Beach Clean weekend, Clean Coasts volunteers are encouraged to conduct marine litter surveys during their clean-ups in order to measure the quantity and variety

of waste found on Irish beaches. The aim of these surveys is to raise awareness around common marine litter and help to illustrate the scale of the problem.

Each year, thanks to the support of communities like yours across the country, the campaign continues to make a huge positive impact on our coastline, beaches, seas, Ocean and waterways.

Check out last year's impact below!



## THE BIG BEACH CLEAN 2025 STATS:

In 2025, over 520 clean-ups engaging almost 11,000 volunteers took place nationwide, ultimately removing over 60 tonnes of litter from Ireland's coastal and inland waterways as part of the Big Beach Clean.



Since 2003, An Taisce's Clean Coasts programme has engaged and supported volunteers and community groups across Ireland in caring for and protecting our beaches, seas, Ocean, inland waterways, and marine life.

For more than two decades, thousands of Clean Coasts volunteers have made a tangible impact on their coastal environment by cleaning large amounts of marine litter from our shores and waterways and by removing inland litter from villages, towns and waterways before it reaches the coast.

Each year, volunteers who take part in the Big Beach Clean help to foster positive impacts both locally and globally.

The Big Beach Clean has been a core element of the Clean Coasts programme since 2011, with hundreds of volunteers registering annually.

This document includes helpful details on how to run your event, important health and safety guidelines, information on the citizen science element of the Big Beach Clean, and more.

**THANK YOU FOR REGISTERING FOR THE BIG BEACH CLEAN 2026!**  
**WE'RE EXCITED TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT FOR OUR COASTLINES THIS YEAR!**

The Big Beach Clean is held annually in conjunction with the **International Coastal Cleanup**, which is an international initiative led globally by **Ocean Conservancy**.

This initiative aims to engage people in removing litter from the world's beaches and waterways. As part of this international clean-up drive and citizen

science action, Clean Coasts volunteers are being invited to contribute towards gathering vital data relating to litter found on Ireland's beaches.

These surveys help record the quantities and varieties of litter found along our shores and aid in raising awareness about marine pollution and highlighting the scale of the issue.



## HOW TO FILL IN YOUR MARINE LITTER DATA CARD

Filling out your data card can be simple and efficient with a little teamwork and the right method. Here's how to do it:

- 1. Pair up with a friend or two:** One person collects the litter and calls out each item, while the other marks it on the survey card with a tick.
- 2. Use the 5-bar gate tally method:** For repeated items, mark one vertical line for each and draw a diagonal line through every fifth to easily keep count.
- 3. Combine your results:** Once your clean-up is complete, gather all the individual cards and tally the results onto one master card.
- 4. Submit your data:** Snap and send a clear photo of your filled in data card (both sides) to [cleancoasts@eeu.antisce.org](mailto:cleancoasts@eeu.antisce.org), upload your results to our website form at [cleancoasts.org](http://cleancoasts.org), or post your completed survey cards back to us at the address found on your data card.
- 5. Label your cards clearly:** If you're part of a group, number each card and note that it's a group clean-up. If you're doing a solo clean-up, please indicate that too.

## BIG BEACH CLEAN DATA COLLECTION CARD

Once you fill out your beach litter data card and send it back to us, we will pass this information on to Ocean Conservancy which will then contribute towards a global report highlighting trends and statistics related to marine litter around the world.

We also compile all national data and publish our own results and statistics. This information will be shared with government bodies and will contribute towards shaping the future initiatives and campaigns we run.

**You'll find a sample Marine Litter Data Card at the end of this brochure, along with a few more included in your pack.**

## CLEAN SWELL APP

Alternatively, you can choose to use the **Clean Swell App** developed by **Ocean Conservancy** to submit your data findings using just your mobile phone. You can track items in real time, and the app works even without Wi-Fi or mobile signal.

The app features 28 categories of waste you can log, including cigarette butts, plastic bottles, fishing gear, and personal hygiene products.

You can also take photos and videos and tag us **@CleanCoasts** on social media, so we can highlight your clean-up efforts and share your finds!

## WHY BE A CITIZEN SCIENTIST?

Becoming a citizen scientist isn't only about collecting data, it's about connecting to something bigger and making a larger positive impact for the future.

Whether you have a background in science or not, anyone passionate about our environment can contribute toward collecting valuable data to help researchers better understand the world around us.

The Big Beach Clean is more than just a clean-up, it's a mission to gain understanding and knowledge around the impacts of marine litter, human activity and positive change. By identifying and counting found litter, you can help to provide crucial clues about where pollution is coming from and which items are the most plentiful or cause the most harm. This knowledge empowers Clean Coasts to lead initiatives and campaigns that tackle the root



causes of litter, protecting our ocean one piece at a time.

Citizen science gives the power to you as a volunteer to make a tangible difference for our marine environment, no matter your background. It's a chance to become an active guardian of our planet.

Joining Clean Coasts' Big Beach Clean is a fantastic step toward safeguarding our stunning coastlines, but why stop there? Beyond the Big Beach Clean you can deepen your connection with Ireland's marine life through the National Biodiversity Data Centre's Explore Your Shore! surveys or by becoming a Clean Coasts Observer.

These citizen science opportunities let you track marine species, spot rare creatures, and contribute vital information that supports conservation efforts.

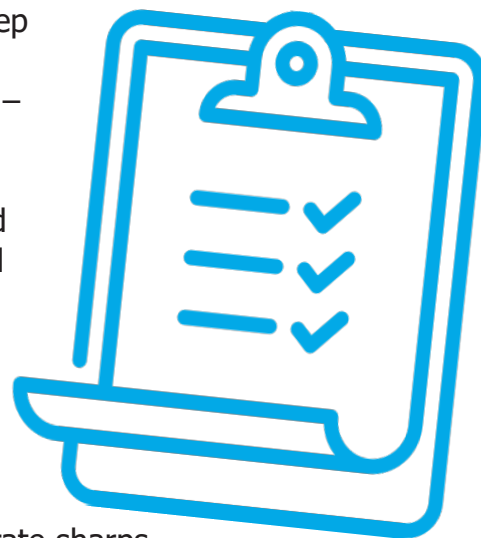
TO ORGANISE YOUR CLEAN-UP, FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

- 1. Choose a location**, be it a beach, lake, river, canal, village, town, or housing estate, that you think would benefit from a clean-up.
- 2. Pick a date/dates and time** for when you would like your clean-up to take place.
- 3. Notify your local authority** of the time and date of the clean-up, if possible, at least a week in advance to facilitate the efficient management of all rubbish and recyclables after the event.
- 4. Complete your risk assessment.** See page 8 of this document. Once you have selected your location you need to complete a risk assessment to ensure it is safe to do a clean-up on. If there are hazards in the area, please select a different site or ensure you direct your volunteers away from any hazards or concerns on the day of the clean-up. If you have any questions or concerns on this you can speak with your regional Clean Coasts Officer.
- 5. Organise your equipment in advance.** Your Big Beach Clean clean-up kit provided by Clean Coasts will include: Hi-Viz vests, gloves and branded rubbish bags. Your local authorities can also provide you with other clean-up items if they are available, such as litter pickers, first aid kit and sharps boxes.



- 6. It is essential that all volunteers wear gloves.** It's always a good idea to ask people to bring their own as many people will have gardening/outdoor gloves and often prefer to use their own and gloves provided may not be of suitable size for everyone.
- 7. Pack drinking water.** It's always a good idea to bring extra drinking water for volunteers.
- 8. Arrive early** on the day of the clean-up and do a quick review and risk assessment of the clean-up location to ensure no particular hazards are new on site.
- 9. Provide a health and safety talk** once all volunteers have arrived. See Health and Safety Checklist for suggestions on what to mention here. If you are unsure of what advice to provide to your volunteers please contact your regional Clean Coasts Officer for advice.
- 10. Ensure the bags are all properly tied** and left in a spot agreed with your local authority at the end of your clean-up. If you are unsure where to leave the bags, ensure that it is somewhere they can be seen, accessible for collection and that they are not within the tidal area of the coast and not blocking access routes.

- **Designate a Safety Officer** and inform volunteers who that person is and provide contact details of the Safety Officer.
- **Survey the clean-up site beforehand** to determine specific hazards. There is a sample **Health and Safety Risk Assessment** on the next page, please complete this before you do your clean-up.
- Please ensure a safety briefing is given before all clean-ups, especially for new volunteers.
- Ensure that all volunteers are aware of who is responsible for the **First Aid kit** and where to find it.
- Wear **good quality rubberised gloves** at all times to keep hands clean.
- **Wear high visibility clothing** such as vests provided in kit – Remember: Be Safe Be Seen.
- Each group should have **litter pickers and rubbish sacks**.
- Please use **hand sanitiser** before and after the clean-up and wear gloves throughout. Always use a litter picker or a shovel when picking up litter and never put your hands where you cannot see them. **Wash hands after clean-up** and before eating or drinking and avoid touching face or eyes while cleaning.
- **Beware of sharp objects**, such as broken glass and syringes. Report any incidences to Safety officer. Any such items should be removed by adults only and placed in a separate sharps box, not rubbish bags.
- **Persons under 18 years** should be supervised by a ratio of at least one adult to every five children.
- **Road traffic:** Stay off roads where possible. High visibility clothing will help you be seen, but it does not make you bulletproof.
- **Manual handling:** If something is heavy don't lift alone, please ask for help and follow safe manual handling procedures.
- **Please adhere to any weather warnings** that are in place at the location of the clean-up and do not complete clean-ups in unsafe conditions.
- Ensure that at least one member of the clean-up has a **working mobile phone** and check that there is **signal** before starting the clean-up.
- Any containers or drums that look as if they may contain/have contained **hazardous material** should not be touched. Keep away and contact the coastguard or county council to report.
- **Report all accidents** or injuries to the Safety Officer.
- **Water clean-ups:** Never enter the water when working in a canal or river clean-ups. Never work on your own, always use the "Buddy" system and ensure that a number of people are with you when cleaning canals or rivers.



- Anyone using **kayaks or canoes** must be trained and experienced to do so.
- Do not try to access difficult areas or enter spaces that may cause you to capsize.
- **Beware of Weil's disease.** If you feel flu like, consult a doctor immediately.

Please complete the following form before you begin your clean-up to ensure you are aware of any hazards and are completing your clean-up in a safe area.

The following form should be completed for each risk associated with a planned activity so that risks and precautions are identified and understood. This form should also be used as guidance for Health and Safety briefings prior to any projects/activities undertaken at beach area.

**NAME:**

**GROUP:**

**LOCATION:**

|                                                         |  |                                                                                |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Have all members received a Health and Safety Briefing? |  | Is there clean water on site or are antiseptic wipes/hand sanitizer available? |  |
| Where is the nearest working phone?                     |  | Is there a throw line on site?                                                 |  |
| Is there a First Aid kit available?                     |  | Is there a sharps box available? (for syringes, glass etc)                     |  |

| What is the potential hazard? | Probability of risk<br>High/Medium/Low | Severity of injury<br>High/Medium/Low | What precautions could be taken to lessen the risk?                          | Is the risk acceptable, i.e. should the project/activity go ahead?<br>YES / NO |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| E.g.<br>Cuts and scrapes      | Medium/Low                             | Low                                   | All volunteers wear gloves<br>Provision of a sharps box for broken glass etc | YES                                                                            |
|                               |                                        |                                       |                                                                              |                                                                                |
|                               |                                        |                                       |                                                                              |                                                                                |

[illegible]

## KIA IRELAND



Kia Ireland are the official sponsor of the Big Beach Clean in 2026. On a global level, Kia are involved with a number of environmental initiatives aimed at reducing their ecological footprint.

Notably, Kia is a global supporter of The Ocean Cleanup, a non-profit organisation dedicated to removing plastic pollution from the world's oceans. In a recent milestone, The Ocean Cleanup successfully retrieved 55 tonnes of plastic from the Pacific Ocean in a single operation, bringing their total ocean waste collection to 53,000 tons since 2013. Some of this plastic is then recycled and upcycled for use in the production of Kia electric vehicles. During production, these vehicles use 10 specifically sourced sustainable items that have either originated from recycled plastic or have been sourced from plant-based materials. This is just one initiative by the brand as part of their 2045 carbon neutrality strategy. In line with these global clean up initiatives, Kia Ireland are encouraging as many people as possible to register for their local beach clean this September. Further information on these initiatives are available on [Kia.com](https://kia.com)



 An Taisce

## NATIONAL SPRING CLEAN

An Taisce's National Spring Clean, Ireland's largest anti-litter initiative, will also support the Big Beach Clean again in 2026. The National Spring Clean takes place annually in the month of April.

National Spring Clean volunteers are encouraged to join the Big Beach Clean once again to spread the impact even further. Did you know that the number one cause of marine litter is from litter dropped in towns and cities, which is followed by overflowing litter bins? Evidence has shown that over 70% of plastic pollution affecting our Ocean comes from land-based actions, so contributing to cleaning up cities and towns has a tangible positive effect on our seas and Ocean too.



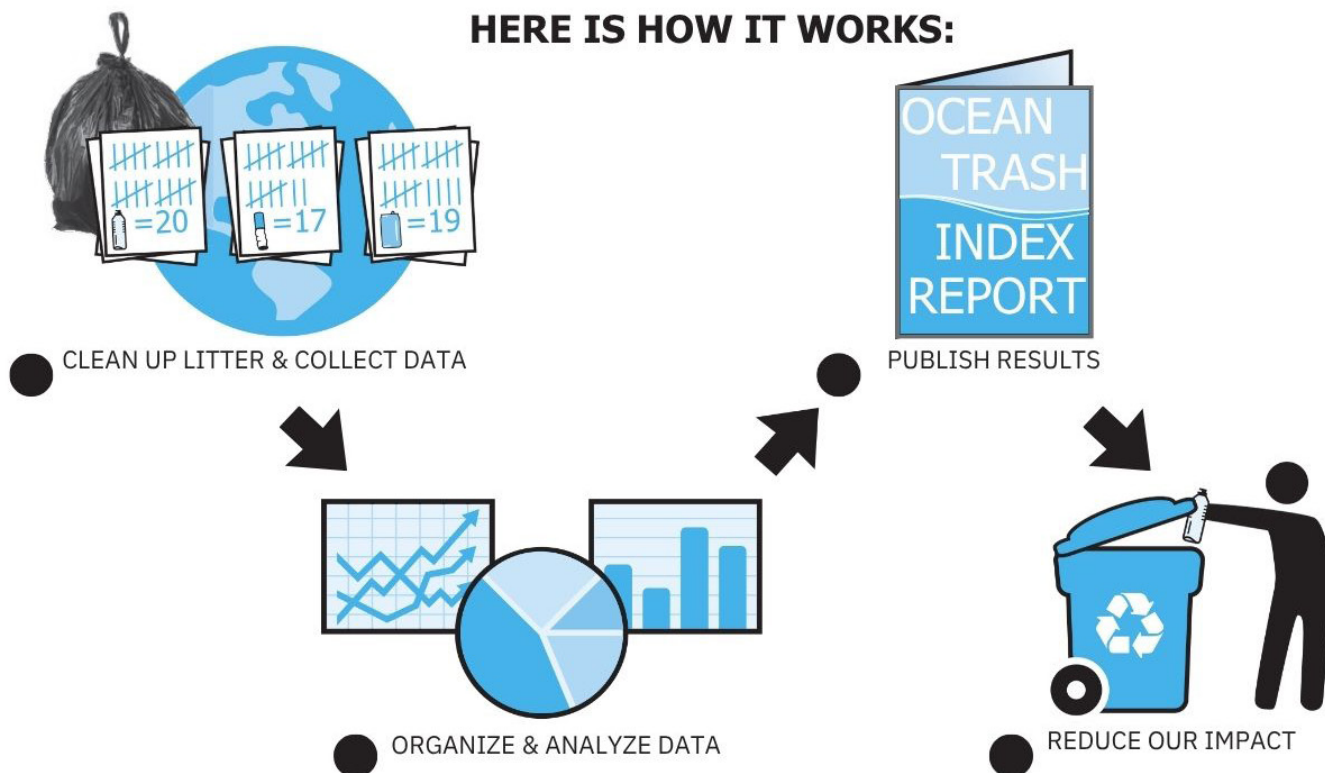
# VOLUNTEER

## MARINE LITTER DATA FORM



Sea and waterway litter ranks as one of the most serious pollution problems choking our planet. Far more than an eyesore, a rising tide of marine debris threatens human health, wildlife, communities and economies around the world. The ocean faces many challenges, but litter should not be one of them. Marine litter is entirely preventable, and data you collect is part of the solution. The International Coastal Cleanup is the world's largest volunteer effort on behalf of ocean and waterway health.

### HERE IS HOW IT WORKS:



#### SITE INFORMATION:

Cleanup Site Name:

Town or City:  County:

Country:  Nearest Crossroad or Landmark:

#### NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS WORKING ON THIS CARD:

adults children (under 12)

MOST UNUSUAL ITEM COLLECTED:

QTY:

TYPE OF CLEAN UP

Land: ☐ Underwater: ☐ Watercraft: ☐

Please return this form to Clean Coasts:

BY POST:  
The Clean Coasts Programme,  
An Taisce – Environmental Education Unit,  
5 Foster Place  
Dublin  
D02 VOP9

SNAP and SEND via EMAIL: [cleancoasts@eeu.antaisce.org](mailto:cleancoasts@eeu.antaisce.org)  
FILL OUT ONLINE: [cleancoasts.org/our-initiatives/big-beach-clean](http://cleancoasts.org/our-initiatives/big-beach-clean)



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# LITTER COLLECTED

Citizen scientist: Pick up all litter and record all items you find below. No matter how small the items, the data you collect are important for Trash Free Seas.®

## EXAMPLE:

Plastic Bags:

||||| III

TOTAL #

= 8

Please DO NOT use words or check marks. Only numbers are useful data.

## MOST LIKELY TO FIND ITEMS:

Cigarette Butts:

Vapes/E-cigarettes:

Food Wrappers (candy, chips, etc.):

Take Out/Away Containers (Plastic):

Take Out/Away Containers (Foam):

Bottle Caps (Plastic):

Bottle Caps (Metal):

Lids (Plastic):

Straws/Stirrers:

Forks, Knives, Spoons:

Beverage Bottles(Plastic):

Beverage Bottles(Glass):

Beverage Cans:

Grocery Bags (Plastic):

Other Plastic Bags:

Paper Bags:

Cups & Plates (Paper):

Cups & Plates (Plastic):

Cups & Plates (Foam):

## FISHING GEAR:

Fishing Buoys, Pots & Traps:

Fishing Net & Pieces:

Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece):

Rope (more than 1 yard/meter = 1 piece):

Rope Pieces/String (less than 1 yard/meter = 1 piece):

## OTHER LITTER:

Appliances (refrigerators, washers, etc.):

Balloons:

Cigar Tips:

Cigarette Lighters:

Construction Materials:

Toys:

Disposable Barbecues:

Tyres:

Footwear:

## PACKAGING MATERIALS:

6-Pack Holders

Other Plastic/Foam Packaging:

Other Plastic Bottles (oil, bleach, etc.):

Strapping Bands:

Tobacco Product Packaging/Wrap:

Condoms:

Nappies:

Syringes:

Tampons/Applicators/Sanitary Towels:

Wet Wipes:

Cotton Bud Sticks:

Clothing/Textiles:

## TINY LITTER LESS THAN 2.5CM:

Foam/Polystyrene Pieces

Glass Pieces

Plastic Pieces

Microplastic Pieces (less than 5mm)

2.5cm  
(actual size)

## DEAD/INJURED ANIMAL

## STATUS

## ENTANGLED

## TYPE OF ENTANGLEMENT ITEM

Dead or Injured

Yes or No

## ITEMS OF LOCAL CONCERN:

1. 2. 3.

## CLEANUP SUMMARY (circle units)

Number of Bin Bags Filled:

Weight of Litter Collected:

lbs/kgs

Distance Cleaned:

miles/km

\*We are always listening to feedback from our groups on commonly found items and we've updated the data card to reflect this. If you have other commonly found items please let us know.