

Ontario's Litter Cleanup Guide for Educators and Schools



**ACT on
LITTER**

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Thank you for your interest in helping to keep our province clean and litter free!

This guide was developed by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and is intended for schools and educators across Ontario, to engage students and youth in litter reduction and prevention efforts.

A separate guide is also available online for the broader public – we encourage educators and schools to share this guide link with parents and guardians:

www.ontario.ca/page/litter-cleanup-guide

If you have questions, please visit:

www.ontario.ca/actONlitter or contact actONlitter@ontario.ca.



Ontario's Commitments and the Provincial Day of Action on Litter

We are taking real action to keep our neighbourhoods, parks, lakes, rivers and streams clean and free of litter and waste, by continuing to lead the annual Provincial Day of Action on Litter. Reducing litter and waste in our communities and encouraging local environmental actions helps keep our province clean and beautiful.

The [Provincial Day of Action on Litter Act, 2019](#) established the second Tuesday of May each year as the Provincial Day of Action on Litter. It encourages individuals, students, municipalities and businesses across the province to work together to raise awareness about the impacts of litter and waste, and to take part in a litter cleanup.

You can learn more on our [actONlitter webpage](#).

Although the Provincial Day of Action on Litter takes place only once a year, we share a number of ways students, educators and schools can get involved year-round in this guide!





How your class or school can support litter prevention and reduction efforts:

1. Recognize the annual Provincial Day of Action in your schools and classrooms.

- Add the Day of Action to your school calendar.
- Encourage students to go waste-free for the day (e.g. no disposable lunch products).
- Host an event on the day, such as litter-less lunch gathering.
- Connect your planned activities for the day, to the topic of litter and waste.

2. Organize a litter cleanup on the Provincial Day of Action on Litter (or any other day) around your school or community! Check out the 'Organizing a Litter Cleanup' section below for more information.

3. Teach students what can be recycled and put in the green bin in your community (if applicable), to minimize the amount of waste going to landfill. Visit your local municipality's waste management webpage for more information and whether your municipality offers downloadable posters, online resources or in-person programs for students.

4. Educate on the importance of proper waste disposal while students are on recess or outside, to help reduce litter from entering our environment! Consider placing anti-littering posters on exit doors.

5. Find connections within the curriculum about litter and waste and incorporate into your lessons.

Organizing a Litter Cleanup

This section provides information and resources to help you organize a litter cleanup, including a comprehensive checklist to help educators and schools organize a safe, successful litter cleanup.

In addition to your local municipal waste management department, there are a number of organizations that support litter cleanup initiatives who may be able to support schools.



CHECKLIST:



Leading up to the cleanup

- ☐ Choose a cleanup day. The Provincial Day of Action on Litter takes place the second Tuesday in May each year, but you can cleanup any day of the year!
- ☐ Identify your cleanup team participants.
- ☐ Choose a cleanup site for your cleanup. Ensure you follow all guidance of your school and school board when selecting a location. Your school property is a good cleanup site. Litter tends to collect along school fence lines, where wind blows litter.
- ☐ Distribute permission slips for activity outside the school, if appropriate.
- ☐ Gather protective equipment, such as gloves or a litter grabber, for your students. It is also a great idea to have hand sanitizer available
- ☐ If your school and school board are ok with your class cleaning up a public space, contact your municipality to identify if any permits are required to host a cleanup there and request help obtaining a permit (if applicable). If cleaning up a private space, ensure you have permission from the property owner.
- ☐ Choose a disposal method, a few examples include:
 - Garbage and recycling bins at your school. You will need to speak with your school caretaker or custodial staff about disposal.
 - If no available method exists for you, reach out to your municipality to see if they can support your disposal, such as by using a city street disposal garbage can and recycling bin, or scheduling a waste pick up at your school.
- ☐ Share important information with your students ahead of your cleanup day, such as:
 - safety tips/recycling tips
 - reminder of what to bring (e.g. garbage and recycling collection bags, water bottle, appropriate clothing for the weather, a mask and gloves, , etc.) - you may be able to acquire garbage and recycling bags from your school's waste management department, but make sure you check first.
 - when and where you are meeting



On the day of the cleanup

- ☐ Prepare any of your coordinator materials (participant attendee list, pens, first aid kit, hand sanitizer, etc.).
- ☐ Meet your cleanup team at your scheduled meeting date, time and location
- ☐ Go over:
 - safety requirements (i.e. wearing gloves and watching for traffic)
 - cleanup boundary
 - end time and meeting point
 - disposal requirements
- ☐ Have students use both a recycling bag and garbage bag to correctly separate recyclable materials from garbage.
- ☐ Have fun! Take photos of your progress and your cleanup team – consider taking a before and after photo of your site to show the progress.

After the cleanup

- ☐ Dispose of your collected litter properly, and ensure collected recyclables are recycled. Ensure used personal protective equipment such as gloves and masks are disposed of properly and safely in a sealed garbage bag.
- ☐ Share pictures of your Provincial Day of Action on Litter event on your school's social media page using the #actONlitter hashtag, for the ministry to see and possibly re-share your post.

SAFETY TIPS!



Safety first! Review the safety tips below and take the necessary precautions during your community cleanup.

- Follow all rules and advice of your school and school board.
- Use personal protective equipment (gloves) or a litter grabber when picking up litter and properly dispose of your own personal protective equipment safely in a sealed garbage bin after your cleanup.
- Cleanups should take place during school hours and daylight hours.
- Be mindful of unstable or slippery ground (e.g. ravines, riverbanks), in tunnels or near stormwater management ponds.
- Consider wearing a safety vest or brightly coloured clothing if collecting litter along a roadway.
- Do not pick up dangerous materials such as glass, barbed wire, syringes/needles, medical waste, pipes, chemicals and debris with sharp or rusted edges. Instead note down the item and the location, and after your cleanup contact your local municipality's waste management department to make them aware.
- Avoid water-filled areas such as ditches, streams or ponds. Be extra cautious in areas where there could be water or ice.
- Be careful of wild animals, insects, hives and nests, and noxious weeds such as poison ivy and giant hogweed.
- Report suspicious items to the local police department via their non-emergency telephone number or to the Ontario Provincial Police non-emergency number at 1-888-310-1122.

RECYCLING TIPS



- Use separate disposal bags for recyclables and garbage whenever possible.
- Some municipalities have a mobile waste app that you can use on the go to find out what items should be recycled versus put in the garbage – check with your local municipality and download the app in advance if available!
- Keep hazardous waste separate from garbage and recycling. Remember safety first! You can always leave certain items as you found them, note down the item and the location, and after your cleanup contact your local waste management department to make them aware or to ask how and where to properly dispose of these items.
- Examples of hazardous waste include:
 - syringes (don't touch!)
 - batteries
 - aerosol containers
 - fluorescent tubes and compact florescent lamps (CFLs)
 - helium and propane/BBQ tanks/cylinders

CLEANUP SITE IDEAS



Make sure you select a site that is large enough for your full class to cleanup. Depending on the grade of the students, you may want to select a site that allows you to keep an eye on all students at the same time (e.g., an open field).

- your school yard
- trails close to your school
- common play areas in your community
- a public park
- the sidewalks along a neighborhood street
- vacant lots or parking lots (ensure you have owner's permission)

This section includes key resources on litter prevention and recycling, as well as interactive activities like quizzes and games to engage students in learning about litter prevention in Ontario.

Definitions

Litter: trash, such as paper, cans, candy wrappers, drink cups, and glass or plastic bottles, that is left lying in an open or public place.

Recycling: the action of converting waste like plastic, metal, glass or paper into reusable materials.

Landfill: A designated place to dispose of waste material.

Blue box: A blue plastic bin or wheeled cart used to hold recyclable materials before they are collected.

Green bin: A green plastic bin or wheeled cart used in some municipalities in Ontario to hold organic compostable materials such as food waste before they are collected.

Quick facts: Waste in Ontario

Share these facts with your classroom to help educate students on the impact of waste in Ontario.

Did you know...

- Each person in Ontario generates approximately one tonne of waste every year.[1] This is equivalent to the weight of an adult giraffe!
- Waste that does not get recycled or go to landfills ends up as litter in our environment, which can have a negative effect on animals and plants.
- It is estimated that almost 10,000 tonnes of plastic waste enters Ontario's lakes and rivers each year. That weighs almost as much as the Eiffel tower!

Quick facts (continued)

- Recycling just one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a TV for three hours – about the time it takes to watch one game of hockey! [3]
- Food scraps can be litter too. Leaving food out can attract wild animals and cause them to lose their natural fear of humans or make them sick from eating the food.[2]
- Plastic can take hundreds or even thousands of years to break down in the environment. Almost every plastic item we have made since the 1950s is still in our environment.[3]

What you can do

Share these tips with your classroom to help educate students on what they can do to reduce waste.

Here are some things you can do:

- Always put your trash, recyclable or organic items in the garbage bin, blue box, or green bin. Never leave them on the ground.
- Learn which items can go in the blue box instead of throwing them in the garbage.
- Ensure containers are cleaned and rinsed before placing them into the blue box.
- Ask your parents to donate your old plastic toys and clothing instead of throwing them away.
- Bring reusable containers in your school lunch instead of disposable plastic.
- Use a metal reusable water bottle instead of disposable plastic water bottles.
- Leave no trace! After any outdoor activity, make sure to bring any balls, sports equipment, plastic water bottles and toys inside, or ensure they are secured in an outdoor storage area or bin.
- Take part in a litter cleanup day.

Appendix A – Test your litter knowledge

Question 1: True or False? Picking up litter can help animals.

Question 2: How long does it take for a plastic water bottle to decompose in a landfill?

- a) 60 years
- b) 100 years
- c) 300 years
- d) 450 years

Question 3: What is the most common form of litter on Canadian shorelines?

- a) Styrofoam cups
- b) Cigarette butts
- c) Plastic bags
- d) Plastic utensils

Question 4: How much plastic waste does the world produce each year?

- a) 100 million tonnes
- b) 200 million tonnes
- c) 350 million tonnes
- d) 500 million tonnes

Question 5: True or false? All plastic is recyclable.

Question 6: Which of the following items are recyclable?

- a) Paper and cardboard
- b) Steel and aluminum
- c) Glass bottles
- d) All of the above

Question 7: What is an action you can take to help reduce litter?

- a) Recycle items properly
- b) Never throw your trash on the ground
- c) Participate in a litter cleanup day
- d) All of the above

Appendix B – Litter Day word search

Z O M Y E N V I R O N M E N T
T L X J H R E C Y C L E I K B
A R P L A S T I C B S J L O O
U L Q Q Q U K V A O U W C E T
G A A F E N P U F N W M E B T
V Q U N Z T B G A R B A G E L
G W N L D Z D I W N F V U F E
G B R L L F W J X C B Q C G O
U U G D L Y I N J C H R L I A
V Z O D I P R L F Y R H E S G
B R R K T A S X L D U D A N Y
U H C J T O K B D Q N Z N X C
Z F I F E Q R V Q G F O U N V
B U T Q R Q I J S P E V P U P
R W N X R H X E Z E X Y U G D

environment
plastic

landfill
garbage

recycle
cleanup

litter
bottle

Appendix C – Matching game

Can you guess where the litter goes? Next to each piece of litter, write the letter of the correct waste container it should go in.

1. Plastic shampoo bottle ----

2. Cardboard box ----

3. Apple core ----

4. Glass bottle ----

5. Chicken bone ----

6. Light bulb ----

7. Facial tissue ----

8. Aluminum can ----



A. Recycling bin



B. Garbage can



C. Green bin/ Compost

Answers

Appendix A – Test your litter knowledge

Answer 1: True. Small animals like mice and chipmunks can crawl into pieces of litter like bottles and cans and get stuck inside. Birds can mistake harmful pieces of plastic for food and eat them by accident.

Answer 2: d) 450 years. The average plastic bottle can take up to 450 years to breakdown in a landfill. Some plastic items can take even longer.[4]

Answer 3: b) Cigarette butts. More than 164,000 cigarette butts were found on Canadian shorelines in 2022.[5]

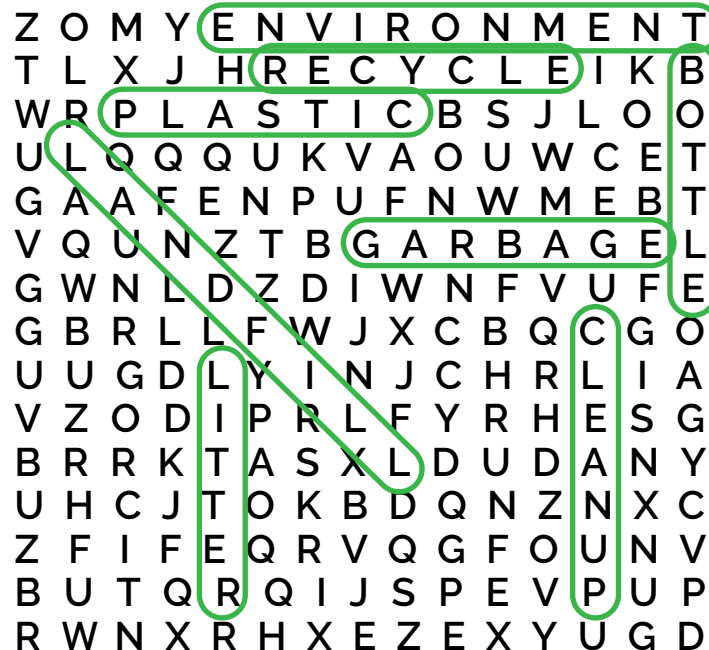
Answer 4: c) 350 million tonnes. Only about 9 per cent of that is recycled.[6]

Answer 5: False. Some types of plastic are more recyclable than others.[7]

Answer 6: d) All of the above. You can find out more about which items can be recycled by visiting your municipality's recycling webpage.[8]

Answer 7: d) All of the above.

Appendix B – Litter Day word search



Appendix C – Matching game

1.A, 2.A, 3.C, 4.A, 5.C, 6.B, 7.B, 8.A

Sources

1. Based on 2020 residential data from Residential Diversion Rate 2020, Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority (RPRA) and 2018 non-residential data from Waste Management Industry Survey: Business and Government Sectors 2018, Statistics Canada.
2. [Feeding wildlife: dos and don'ts](#) - ontario.ca
3. [Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario: Building the Circular Economy](#)
4. [Degradation Rates of Plastics in the Environment](#) - ACS Sustainable Chemistry & Engineering
5. [Cigarette butts, plastic and food wrappers remain top litter items on Canadian shorelines](#) - Ocean Wise
6. [Plastic Waste: Challenges and Opportunities to Mitigate Pollution and Effective Management](#) - PMC
7. [The world of plastic waste: A review](#) - ScienceDirect
8. [What Goes in the Blue Bin \(Recycling\)?](#) – City of Toronto



We thank you for your support and interest in litter and waste prevention and reduction, and for recognizing the Provincial Day of Action on Litter.

Questions? Email actONlitter@ontario.ca

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