

# Trash Pickup Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions

## What should I bring?

Wear or bring:

Sturdy Closed-Toe Shoes	Sunscreen
Long Pants and Sleeves	Layers
Tall Socks	Plastic Bag (for dirty personal items)
Mask if sensitive to smells	Water

WHS supplies:

Trash Pickers/Tongs	Gloves
Trash Bags	Handheld Brooms/Rakes
Trash Disposal	Hazardous Material Disposal
Disinfectant Wipes	

## Are there any safety concerns?

Yes. Unfortunately, there are several safety concerns to be aware of when cleaning up trash in our community. While it is impossible to avoid every dangerous situation, there are preventative measures you can take to avoid danger:

- Never blindly reach to pick up trash or step into areas to pick up trash.
- Stay close to your group and do your best work in pairs.
- Always be aware and vigilant of your surroundings and locations.
- There are some litter picks that are not appropriate for children to attend. When it is appropriate for children to attend, please keep a close eye on them.
- Exercise extreme caution in brush, bushes, or areas covered by leaves as this is often where syringes and other unsafe litter can be found.
- Be aware containers with liquid waste may contain human waste.
- Avoid picking up trash in the middle of the road.
- Wear highly visible clothing or vest when picking up trash near roads.
- If you cannot identify something, use a hands-off tool such as a rake, broom, trash picker, tongs, or other long tools to place it before picking it up.
- Wear durable waterproof and cut-proof gloves.
- Ensure that your feet are adequately protected with durable, hard-to-puncture boots.
- Use a dustpan to sweep up broken glass or other small items.
- If you encounter a dangerous situation such as harassment from others, leave the area and dial 9-1-1 for assistance.

- Dangerous or unsafe litter includes, but is not limited to:

Syringes, needles, pipes and tinfoil	Razor blades
Glass	Bottles, drums, and other containers
Dead animals	Containers containing human waste
Human waste	Hazardous household products
Sharp Metals	Trash bags

### How do I identify a syringe?

A syringe usually has three parts: the syringe, the orange needle and the orange plunger cap. Usually, you will first see the orange caps before you see the needle. Be extra cautious and careful when you spot these items as there are likely to be more nearby.

### What should I do if I find syringes or other hazardous items?

As this is a community effort, we do not recommend what you should or shouldn't do. Please use your best judgment in deciding if you should pick it up or not.

1. If you do not feel comfortable picking it up, see if anyone in your group is. Anyone under 18 should not pick up syringes and should get an adult.
2. If you do not feel comfortable picking it up and is no one is around who is willing to pick it up, use the "Find It, Fix It" app to report it.
3. If you are comfortable picking it up, be extremely careful and use:
  - Tongs or a trash grabber to prevent an accidental stick and the spread of germs,
  - A thick plastic container with a tight-fitting lid, such as a sharps container sold at a pharmacy, soda bottle, or Tupperware.
    - Place the container close by on the ground.
    - Grab it by the plastic in the middle of the barrel, never by the needle.
    - Don't recap it the needle.
    - Place the needle in the container, sharp end down. Never try to hold the container as you place the syringe inside. You could accidentally stick yourself.
    - Secure the lid on the container and affix with tape.
    - Label the container "SHARPS, DO NOT RECYCLE"
    - Seek medical attention immediately if you receive an accidental stick or cut from the used sharp.

**Do not throw syringes away in unidentifiable containers or with the regular trash. It is illegal in Seattle and can cause injury to waste management employees handling trash.** For more info see [KUOW provides safety tips \(https://www.kuow.org/stories/i-found-a-used-needle-what-should-i-do\)](https://www.kuow.org/stories/i-found-a-used-needle-what-should-i-do).

## **What should I do after the Trash Cleanup?**

- When finished, cover trash pickers with a plastic bag. Clean the picker once soap and hot water is available.
- Wash clothes, equipment and hands with soap and hot water.

## **What happens with the trash and sharps?**

We dispose of the trash, sharps and recycle hazard bins.

## **What is a sharps container?**

A sharps container is a red bio-hazard container that is used safely discard used needles. A sharp container is also helpful for waste disposal facilities in ensuring the safety of its employees. Orange needle caps and other small sharp objects like broken glass shards and knife blades should also be thrown away in sharps containers.

## **What if the sharps container is full?**

If a sharps container is full, cap and seal it, and take it to the trash pickup organizer. If you do not feel comfortable closing it, the trash pickup organizer will do this.

## **What should I do if I find a large dumping zone?**

Generally, we will report it with the “Find It, Fix It” app as we don’t always have room to haul it away. If we do have space, we will take it to the dump with everything else.

## **Should I clean up a tent or a potential sleeping area?**

- First and foremost, be kind and considerate to our unhoused neighbors. This includes being respectful of their living areas.
- We Heart Seattle has guidelines for ensuring we are respectful of our neighbors and their belongings and will provide specific guidance for clean-up protocols close to any tents or sleeping areas.
- We suggest a guideline of cleaning no closer than 20 feet away from a tent or sleeping area in a greenspace and 5 feet away in a paved sidewalk/street. But whenever in doubt, please consult with the We Heart Seattle Executive Director or designee on site for guidance.

## **Should I accept a gift from or make a trade with a fellow volunteer or neighbor?**

- NEVER accept a personal gift from a fellow volunteer or neighbor during the WHS event, regardless of whether the person is offering it freely and regardless of its monetary

value. This includes, but is not limited to food, cigarettes, clothing, bracelets, artwork, furniture, or bike parts.

- If the person offers to sell or trade you an item, do not engage in the transaction unless given the explicit “okay” by our Executive Director or more than one high impact volunteer who agree the transaction meets our standards of a fair and level transaction.
- If the offer is for supplies used for our work or to be given to other people in need, then handle this as a donation to WHS but not to you personally. Involve at least one high impact volunteer to accept the item. You may document the transaction using our General Release form.
- If the offer is from a commercial business in appreciation of volunteer labor, and if the offer is from a manager level person in the business, then you can handle it as an in-kind donation to WHS.

Thank you for giving your time and energy to help our community.