

Think Safety

Your safety and health is very important to us. There are several key points to keep in mind when you are preparing for a Rivers Alive event. During rain events, stream levels can rise rapidly causing bacteria levels to increase. We urge volunteers to avoid cleaning during high flows, thoroughly wash your hands after cleaning, and always work in pairs. During the summer season, poison ivy is rapidly growing, and snakes and bees are out enjoying the warm temperatures, so be conscious of your surroundings.

To ensure a fun and educational trip to your stream, wetland or lake, please keep these simple precautions in mind:

- Always visit a site in pairs so one can go for help if the other is unable to
- Never work if the water is flooding or after a heavy rain - fast moving water is very dangerous
- Avoid steep banks as access points; wear a life jacket if near deep water
- Avoid touching your face and be sure to wash hands before eating
- Know the location of the nearest phone or take a cell phone with you
- Have an emergency plan ready – who will go for help? Does anyone know CPR? Does anyone have allergies?
- Be conscious of wildlife such as snakes, alligators and snapping turtles -leave them alone and they will leave you alone
- Look out for broken glass, poison ivy, ticks, bees, fire ants, and other hazards
- Be aware of the road and surroundings - both driving to the site and while conducting activities
 - Vehicles may not see you getting in and out of your car – bridges are narrow
 - Safely park with enough room to get out and walk to your site
 - If walking under a bridge, watch for objects knocked off the road from overhead.
- Bring a first aid kit

What should be in the first aid kit?

A good first aid kit should contain the following:

- Telephone numbers of emergency personnel
- First aid manual that outlines diagnosis and treatment procedures
- Disposable gloves
- Bandages for minor cuts
- Gauze pads 3 and 4 inches square for deep wounds with excessive bleeding
- 1 or 2 inch roll of adhesive tape for holding bandages in place, covering blisters, and taping sprained ankles
- Tweezers and needle for opening blisters and removing splinters
- Single-edged razor blade for cutting tape and shaving hairy spots before taping
- 12-inch roll of gauze bandage for large cuts
- Butterfly bandages for closing cuts, triangular bandage for large wounds, splints, or slings, and large compress bandage to hold dressings in place
- 3-inch-wide elastic bandage for sprains or applying pressure to bleeding wounds
- Antibiotic salve
- Hand sanitizer (may also be used to sanitize instruments before and after use)
- Clean water for washing wounds

What if someone gets hurt?

In the case of severe injury, the first priority is to stabilize the victim. One person should go for help while another stays with the injured person. The coordinator should be notified as soon as possible, even if it is a minor injury. Each cleanup will have first aid kits, and ideally, each group of volunteers should have someone trained in first aid. To obtain training and certification in first aid, contact your local Red Cross office, which can be found at www.redcross.org.

Can volunteers work alone?

It is best if volunteers work in groups of three or more. If one person is injured, one can stay with the injured person while the other goes for help.

What should I do if there is poison ivy?

There will most likely be poison ivy at your cleanup site. Be aware that poison ivy starts losing its leaves in October in Georgia, making it harder to spot, but it is still possible to have an allergic reaction to the bare vines. Prevention is always the best policy. Gloves, long pants tied at the top of boots, and long sleeved shirts can help prevent exposure. Make sure volunteers are able to identify poison ivy (in addition to poison oak, poison sumac, and stinging nettle if these grow in your area) and advise them to wash all clothing and equipment as soon as they get home. If exposure does occur, flush the area with large amounts of cool water as soon as possible. Poison ivy rashes can be treated with many over-the-counter ointments.

What should I do if there are ticks?

If your cleanup site is in a wooded or brushy area, tick exposure is likely. Light-colored clothing makes it easier to spot ticks, and pants tied or tucked into boots and commercial tick repellants will help to reduce the probability of bites. DEET, permethrin (Permanone, Duranon, etc) and sulfur powder are good tick repellents, but must be used with care, especially on children. Volunteers should be advised to check themselves carefully for "passengers" when they get home, paying special attention to the scalp and using a mirror to check hard-to-see areas. Clothing should be shaken and washed immediately. If an attached tick is found, it should be grasped firmly with tweezers as close to the skin as possible and pulled out. The area should then be washed with soap and water, checking to make sure that no mouthparts remain embedded in the skin, and apply an antibiotic salve. Ticks can carry disease, so if a rash or flu-like symptoms appear within a month after the bite, medical help should be sought immediately.

What about large drums or other suspicious-looking containers?

Don't touch them. While most of the trash encountered can be safely removed by volunteers, there are items that should be avoided. Large drum-type containers that may contain hazardous wastes and other suspicious-looking containers, such as hospital wastes or explosives, should be reported to the event coordinator, who should then inform the proper authorities. Workers should not attempt to lift heavy objects without sufficient help.

What else should be avoided?

Volunteers may encounter animals such as dogs, cows, turtles, fish, or goats. The best policy is to leave them alone. Debris piles and vegetated areas may contain snakes, hornets, and wasps and should be approached with caution. Avoid trespassing on private property.