

## **Urban/Suburban litterpicking guidelines – Guidelines for waste collection in urban and suburban areas – Version 1.9**

*Considerations derived from personal experiences – Kindly translated with the help of Google Translate from the Italian version*

Collecting small waste manually in urban and extra-urban areas is tiring and risky work: it is therefore advisable to take certain precautions, especially when you are not an expert.

Equipment (most can be bought in hardware stores or in some cases in supermarkets) :

- It is strongly recommended to wear sneakers or trekking shoes, suitable for walking in the grass and brushwood.
- The use of gloves is mandatory. Personally I use the laminated fabric ones that I find at the supermarket.
- Garbage bags: mandatory. Personally, I recommend using small-sized bags and I strongly recommend using those with a built-in string as a "handle" so as not to go crazy and waste too much time closing the bag and transporting it.
- Sticks for collecting garbage: I personally don't recommend them. I tried two and they both broke very quickly, and even trying to fix them didn't help. They are often heavy and therefore involve much greater fatigue for the operator. Bending down at the moment, even if a bit tiring, at the moment remains the easiest solution (for which I recommend using gloves). It takes a bit of effort with the back, but using the hands for harvesting still makes the process much easier, so if you don't bend over with the harvest stick but use your arms and back more, bending over is the back that struggles, but the harvesting phase, if done with the hands, becomes extremely easy and smooth (compared in my opinion to that done with sticks). This may be true for a person with little muscles (eg 45-55 kg, while it might be more comfortable for other more robust people to use a litterstick). If you decide to use it, in any case DO NOT tug or tug - most will probably break. Now, it's been a while since I've tried those litterstick, I don't know if they've made new ones that are ultra light and ultra strong, but personally I feel so comfortable with my hands that it never crossed my mind to try again to use sticks for collection. Clearly using the manual collection with gloves directly, you come into contact with the bacteria a little more, even then when you take off your gloves. But if, for example, you have to collect cigarette butts with waste collection sticks, it's a bit too crazy ...
- Bottle of still water: keep a few handy in your vehicle. Personally I have never kept any with me while I was working to try to have as little weight on as possible, but certainly having water in your vehicle, possibly together with some fruit or a few packets of crackers could be useful.
- Cell phone/smartphone: almost mandatory. For two reasons: the first is that if you find an area particularly demanding or that you cannot tackle due to fatigue (because collecting waste in urban and extra-urban areas is a very tiring activity and usually it is not possible to operate for more than one or two hours) you can still report it via special apps to the waste collection manager in your area or to the Government Office of your municipality or in any case to the applications or portals made available by your municipality. The second is, in case of emergency, to call for help. Personally, I don't use the data network, I limit myself to taking the necessary photos, then when I return home I then make the necessary reports via computer by downloading the photos taken with the smartphone onto the PC. I have noticed that by doing this I am quite comfortable and everything is done rather promptly.
- Reflective jacket: strongly recommended, mandatory if you work near road areas with sidewalks or in any case in areas very close to roads. It's not necessary if you're cleaning up parks.

- Transparent protective goggles or visor: their use is strongly recommended but only if you are working in wooded areas, to protect yourself from twigs that could skin the most delicate areas of the face. I don't use them, but usually when I get close to trees or bushes with branches I always operate in the following ways:
  - 1) How to reach the area to be cleaned while protecting your eyes from twigs
  - 2) Once I reach the area to be cleaned, if necessary I bend down and collect
 In any case, the most delicate and vulnerable part is always the eyes. Pay close attention.
- Cap: recommended, to protect yourself from the sun. However, I've never put it on but it doesn't mean it can't be used. In the summer, in any case, it is advisable to operate only in the early morning and at sunset in order to work in the cool.
- Other: if you work in the summer, you may also need sunscreen, as protection ...

Of course, as far as clothing is concerned, a lot depends on the climate of that area ... an African who collects garbage in Africa will not dress like a German who collects garbage in Germany ... the temperatures are very different ...

#### Risks :

- In addition to being a particularly tiring activity, litterpicking involves some risks due to some types of particularly dangerous waste. In general, if you work for a company that does this type of activity, it is advisable to have health insurance coverage. If you go alone ... know that there may be some risk, especially if you collect from ditches (it is very tiring).
- If you see bins or containers filled with chemicals, call environmental protection.
- If you have another job, know that this is very tiring and stressful. Surely you can't do it if you're a professional cook. Personally, however, I have found that it is very good in general. The advantages are :
  - Strengthening of the muscles of the back, arms and legs
  - Improving your immune defenses
  - Psychological improvements due to the continuous activity of "trash identification". Identifying trash with your eyesight and handling this type of object leads to improvements in your mental faculties, especially for those who use computers and virtual environments a lot.
  - Improve your social reputation
  - I advise against this type of activity for very tall or not sufficiently agile people ... you often bend down to pick up with your hands and the back is notable ...
  - Another thing: it can happen, given the fatigue, to suddenly be prey to 'blunders' of considerable intensity ... by now I've gotten used to it a bit and more or less ignore it. In case, however, even if I were to pass out, I would still fall on the grass, so I never worried too much about it ...

#### Logistics :

- Quantity of work: A day of morning and afternoon work allows you to collect, depending on the density of scattered rubbish, from 15 to 40 medium-sized bags. However, working for a whole day is so tiring that it requires, even in cases of extremely careful diet (vegan or fruitarian), 1 and a half days of rest (especially if you are not used to it). Personally, doing it as a volunteer, I adopt this method: I work until I feel the first great tiredness which forces me to stop to take a breath and drink a little. At that point I stop completely, because the remaining strength is needed to take a shower and be able to use the remaining part of the day to relax a bit.

- Vehicles: it is convenient to be able to collect the bags nearby before physically transporting them to a collection center (bells, dumpsters or collection areas). Sometimes you can directly throw the garbage bags directly into other bins that are in that area. An ape car or a pickup truck with a high barrier trailer could be the ideal vehicle. If you use an old car, remember to put a cloth to protect the seats so as not to damage the interior, whether it is the rear seats or the trunk, or place the bags where you keep your feet. Personally, I have only rarely transported bags because I have usually always found dumpsters or bins nearby.
- Coordination: coordinating this type of work, to go and intervene only in critical areas, would be ideal. Personally, I haven't had this type of problem because I've always worked alone, but if many people decide to try their hand, this possibility could arise, and it could still be solved using special apps.
- Method of work: I have always worked alone, but I realized that working in two is perhaps ideal, also because in case of problems we can still assist each other.
- Avoid low-density areas if there are any high-density ones. There are areas where the density can be lower than 0.05 elements (cans/bottles/bottles) per m<sup>2</sup>, especially if they are roads. When working on foot it is better to concentrate (with manual harvesting) in the areas where they are denser.
- Do not collect objects that are too large: if you find a piece of furniture or a mattress and you don't have suitable means and tools, leave it where it is and report it via the app or to the Government Offices of your municipality if necessary.
- Do not enter private fenced areas: in those cases the law establishes that pollution can be a criminal offence. If you find very serious situations, file a complaint. If you find light situations offer the owners (if they can be found) to clean up the area for a fee. If so, bring a receipt booklet with you. If the situation is somewhere between the two ... you decide ...
- In some cases, in some parks I happened to find myriads of very small waste. I personally managed to clean up even areas in that state, but a great deal of patience is needed. Perhaps in those cases a vacuum cleaner could be used directly (I saw it done in a video) but I personally have never tried it.
- Remember that aluminum cans, if they have been damaged by grass clippings, are sharp and if you are not careful with your grip you could easily tear your gloves and cut yourself. The same could be true with glass shards of bottles. In that case double precaution is needed. However in general if you are careful enough with laminated gloves I have never had any particular problems.
- When you collect rubbish it sometimes happens that you find very particular objects: colored stones, small jewels or other very particular objects. Sometimes I put them in my pocket and kept them as personal items, using them as knick-knacks.

#### Briefing :

- Waste is found in abundance on roadsides, in green areas, and very often in ditches. Precautions should therefore be taken: a certain physical endurance is required.
- If you are driving and see garbage on the side of the road DO NOT STOP!! It's dangerous!! In those cases it is advisable to intervene with special means, eventually cordoning off the area in order to avoid problems with other vehicles.
- Waste sometimes tends to be covered by foliage or grass. In those cases, when you feel, you can sometimes hear the bottles or cans creak. In some cases (very often) rubbish can be found under the leaves, and in certain types of undergrowth a real carapace made of cans and bottles, carefully camouflaged by the vegetation. In those cases it is necessary to move the foliage slightly with your hands, PAYING ATTENTION, in order to discover the waste enough to be able to collect it. In those cases, and even if you collect it on the beach, shake to remove as much soil or sand as possible.
- In previous versions I wrote not to collect paper because it is biodegradable anyway. I

actually collect it. The important thing, however, are the plastic bottles, aluminum cans and glass bottles (often containing beers or spirits), plastic sheets, polystyrene parts, etc.

- If the grass has been mowed, BE VERY CAREFUL. The cans, cut, are very sharp, and they CUT. Less plastic bottles, but glass ones are found and if broken they are also dangerous. In those cases, look closely and be careful (that's why gloves are needed). Cut cans are among the sharpest things you can find, if you do collect them so it's always wise to be extra careful and use a gentle grip. If I remember correctly, my gloves may have been cut once, but I never suffered any injuries of any kind to my hands anyway.
- Sometimes we run out of bags. Personally, when I work, I keep some in the pocket of my overalls or in any case nearby and when I fill one I take out the next bag and deposit the full and tied bag on site or in a nearby collection area set up for this purpose. Once an area has been completed, all the bags are collected and placed in a bin or have them collected by the company that deals with waste collection, making a specific notification via the app.
- When you fill a bag, especially if you work alone, it may be convenient to leave the bag on site and pick it up at a later stage, otherwise whoever is with you can take care of transporting it to a collection area. In any case, do not block the passage of cyclists or vehicles, but do not leave them in a ditch.
- When you have left around 4-5 full closed bags, you can go around to collect them and take them to an aggregation area (a transport vehicle or dumpsters, if there are any nearby). At most I managed to carry 6-7 full light bags at a time, taking them with my arms, but it's better not to overdo it.
- Try to prepare yourself mentally from the day before. Don't bother once you're in the operational phase.
- As for the dead animals, I have personally collected and managed those as well. I have a special plastic bin in which I put the remains which I then bury in my mother's garden.
- As for animal droppings, I hardly ever collected them. In any case I could want to use another bin and bury those too using them as fertilizer.
- Waste collection which is done by hand is always and only UNDIFFERENTIATED. Whatever you find, don't worry about differentiating, the important thing is to collect and throw the full bags in the bins or bins. If you find some whole plastic bottles, always empty them if you can and reduce their volume before closing the cap and putting it in the bag. If you find whole cans you can empty them, and if you want you can also reduce the volume but always being careful.
  - In any case, with experience you will understand how to operate better.
  - Remember that if you don't have signs or regular municipal permits, you can only operate in non-hazardous areas where there is no hindrance to vehicles. If you are close enough to a road but have parked in a place where there is no obstacle for others, remember to wear a traffic jacket.

Filosophy :

I personally think that waste is a problem :

- Serious: the presence inside the ditches or under the bush has meant that the problem became serious without us even realizing it.
- Laborious : as explained above, it is a rather strenuous job.
- Risky: there are health risks, mainly due to some types of hazardous waste (typically medical or pharmaceutical devices), but also to the passage of vehicles nearby. Added to these are waste with sharp parts such as aluminum cans ruined by grass clippings. Not to mention areas near ponds or lakes. Don't go out to pick up a bottle near the edge of a pond or lake, it's better not to risk falling into the water.

- Urgent : if they are on the grass, they show up. If the grass has grown, they are hidden, but they are taken. If they are in ditches, they are hidden and difficult to access. I'm not going on with the list.

If no one pays you and you do it as a volunteer, you are practically gladiators: RESPECT. I personally believe that food and drink can easily be offered to those who carry out this type of activity as a volunteer (it would be an act of great civility), as well as some other benefits. In any case, it may be advisable to bring a packed lunch with you in your vehicle (be light: fruit and vegetables are excellent), or thirty euros to buy food in some restaurant where you are, based on how you proceed with work, but only possibly before work and never after ... Obviously wash your hands thoroughly a couple of times before eating.

As regards the collection phase, I personally advise not to mentally curse whoever threw that waste there. There's no point in getting angry, save your strength to work.

As for the ditches, there is a separate discussion to be made. All the garbage that is not collected, with the wind tends to end up substantially towards the lower areas, or the ditches (this without counting those who throw waste from the car that ends up in it ...). Unfortunately, when the ditches are mowed, the waste is shredded, and with the rains it tends to be dragged towards the sea by the current. This is how plastic ends up in the oceans.

Clearing the ditches of garbage is even more tiring work than collecting garbage from flat areas, and it is only possible to do it if the ditches are almost completely dry. Even The Ocean Cleanup crew noticed this problem and began to engineer devices to intercept the garbage flowing into rivers.

As far as park management is concerned, governments should understand that it makes no sense to have the grass mowed if there is waste to be collected, and that litterpickers should completely clean up the park before mowing, because with mowing even waste is shredded and then it becomes extremely tiring and laborious to go and collect the various fragments.

Furthermore, if you are interested in trying to create some tool that collects garbage through automatic recognition of waste, through robotic arms, etc ... on my github repository you will find a potentially interesting open-source project.

If you think that the work is scarce, report from the site "[www.trashout.ngo](http://www.trashout.ngo)" :

**55,000+ : Illegal dumps reported**

**4,000 : Illegal dumps cleaned**

I noticed however that these stats are exactly the same as when I read them for the previous version of this document, so I'm not sure exactly what to think...

On this site you can find some areas where the presence of waste has been reported:

<http://www.trashout.ngo>

Personal experience of a collector :

<http://www.litterheroes.co.uk/> → have become a paid litter and waste cleaning service in England : <https://www.wayst.co.uk/>

Here you can buy sticks (I don't recommend them) for collection and other items :

<http://www.ebay.com>

Maybe also on amazon:

<http://www.amazon.it>