



Upstream[®] Battle

A toolkit to take Upstream Battle
to your waterway



Keep Scotland
Beautiful

Your charity inspiring action for our environment

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Just want to know how to do a litter pick? [Click here or go to page 8.](#)

Introduction

Upstream Battle® is our campaign tackling marine litter from source to sea.

Litter and littering behaviours are complex. We need to remove litter from waterways and prevent it from getting there in the first place. The campaign is divided into three strands of work to ensure we are considering the whole picture of what can be done to tackle the issue as we feel there are several aspects that will help solve the problem.

1

Gather data and evidence to better understand the specific items that are being littered and the behaviours surrounding that. This toolkit shows how gathering evidence can help inform activities, including a guide on how to conduct an Upstream Battle survey.

2

Inspire action across the wider community whether that be to take part in a local litter picking activity or collecting surveys along your local waterway.

3

Raises awareness of the issues and potential solutions by communicating the campaign within your local community.

After launching Upstream Battle across the Clyde Valley in 2018 and Tayside in 2021, the campaign has continued to build momentum in each area. In 2023 in response to the huge public and political concern around marine litter, the campaign extended nationally. Whether you are an enthusiastic individual, a community group or a business, we wanted to provide you with a toolkit to help you begin your own upstream battle.



Upstream[®] Battle

Upstream Battle supports the objectives of the Marine Litter Strategy for Scotland, by increasing the number of Scottish waterways engaged with litter reduction projects.

Wherever you are across Scotland you can use this toolkit to help start, continue or join the dots in your local community.



Let's get started!

Considerations before you start...

You may like to consider a few questions when planning to take action. Asking these questions may help identify the key types, quantities and potential sources of litter.



What is a good amount of data to collect?



What sort of litter is appearing consistently?



Are there local 'grot spots' (particularly bad areas)?



Are there any fast food outlets or supermarkets nearby where people might be buying food to go?



Are there bins in this area?
Are they overflowing?



What infrastructure is in the area (eg bridges, trainlines or major roads)?



Could there be a difference in litter upstream and downstream?



Who uses this waterway?
Are there users on and off the water? Is there pedestrian access, parks, cycleways, commuters or leisure?



Are there major cities / towns or businesses upstream? Where is the litter likely to be coming from if it doesn't seem local?

Collecting evidence

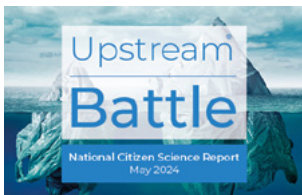
Whilst we know that around 80% of marine litter is estimated to come from land, we want to know how, where, and what types of litter is entering our local waterways.

By collaborating with individuals; community groups; young people; and businesses, we want to create Scotland's first comprehensive data set of litter in and around our rivers and waterways. This citizen science dataset can help us to understand exactly what we need to do to target those responsible for littering and support those trying to make a difference locally, and decision-makers nationally.

The benefits of gathering evidence:

- ✓ Collecting data regularly (or in a methodical way) enables you to build a comprehensive picture and inform others about the issues you may be finding.
- ✓ Data is evidence that can support potential requests of councils or landowners in relation to issues around litter and waste.
- ✓ Evidence can support, more generally, the outcomes you want for your community.
- ✓ Knowing the numbers and types of litter may help you to find practical approaches to tackle local issues.

We think that the Upstream Battle data, gathered through Citizen Science across Scotland, is of vital importance in tackling riverine litter as it brings about positive action to change behaviour. The data you gather helps to inform future policy e.g. the ban on single use vapes across the country.



[See our National Citizen Science Report](#) to see how individual surveys can be brought together into one report highlighting national issues.



Case study:

Citizen science approach - River Annan vs River Nith

In 2024, we supported local community groups in Dumfries and Galloway to collect citizen science data on the River Annan and River Nith. On the Annan, we teamed up with Dumfries and Galloway Council's Environmental to work with two groups: Restoring Annan's Water and The Annan Harbour Action Group to get an overview of where the litter hot spots were across the Annan and its tributaries. On the Nith, we engaged with Nith Life who are a group that explores ways to ensure the River Nith is recognised as a significant part of the region's future sustainability plans.



Approach 1: Surveys along several sections

River Annan

For this approach, instead of surveying one stretch of the river, the environmental team divided up the river into sections. Eight volunteers then split into pairs and surveyed between three and five sections each, resulting in a total of 21 surveys across the Annan including six tributaries: Kinnel Water, Water of Ae, Dryfe Water, Wamphray Water, Mein Water and Water of Milk.

Positives:

- + This approach means we can analyse data from a wider area and compare the differences in litter items across several sections of the river.
- + Contributes to a larger picture of the types of litter getting into our waterways in Dumfries and Galloway.

Limitations:

- A lot of the areas surveyed could only be accessed by car.
- The collective feeling of doing a litter pick together was limited due to the group being split up into pairs.
- Harder to manage and monitor the survey data on the day with groups being split across locations.

VS

Approach 2: Surveys in a concentrated section

River Nith

The approach taken for this event involved surveying a 600m section of one side of the River Nith in a residential area, two miles north of Dumfries. Eight volunteers split into two groups of four with one group carrying out three surveys along the first 300m section and the second group carrying out three surveys on the next 300m stretch.

Positives:

- + Surveys in a focused area helps target and identify the most littered item more easily, and may help find the reasons why specific items are more prevalent.
- + Team bonding and the social aspect of a litter pick, which is good to both health and wellbeing.
- + While dependant on the specific location, surveying over a concentrated area can make the activity more accessible.

Limitations:

- The data gathered was only from one area – so doesn't give the wider picture of litter problems along the Nith.
- Would need to consider gathering data over a longer period in the same area to gain a better understanding of the problem.



Where to start:

Pick a location. Find an area adjacent to water that has a path or open area such as a park, making sure that it is safe to access. Consider how people will travel to the location, its accessibility, and whether you will be providing refreshments afterward - as this can be a good incentive for volunteers.

Pick a date for your activity. Try to avoid conflicts with existing events in your community. Consider whether weekday evenings or weekends are the best timings.

A guide to organising an activity

Creating an Upstream Battle activity could include a **survey**, a **litter pick** or a combination of them both. They are a great way to get your community excited about tackling the marine litter problem and contributing to the national campaign. It is an opportunity to collaborate with others in your community to organise fun and engaging events. You could also go further by planning a week of action or a community campaign that has long term positive impacts for your local waterway and for your community.

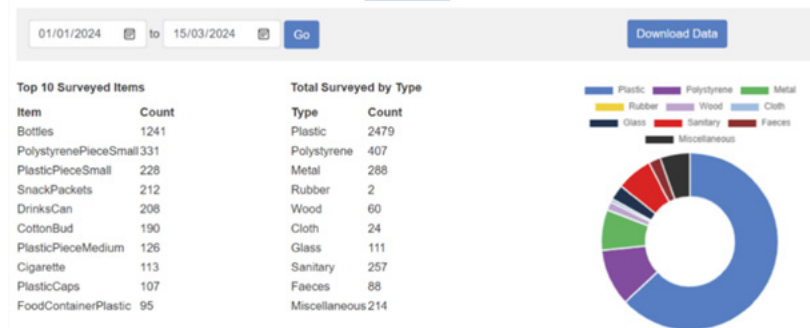
Are you conducting a survey?

- For detailed instructions for carrying out a litter survey, please consult our [Upstream Battle Survey Guide](#).
- Become familiar with the litter [survey sheet](#), which details the types of litter you may find.
- Register an account on the Clean Up Scotland online portal.
- You may wish to print out paper copies of the survey sheet to count and record the litter found, or you can complete the survey on your mobile device through the [online portal](#).
- After you have completed a survey, upload data gathered for Upstream Battle to our [Clean Up Scotland online portal](#) to contribute to the national data set. Recording the date and location of your survey and the litter counts will mean this information can be used to support future work and policy recommendations.

See our Reports and Publications webpage for previous reports, many of which use data from the online portal.

By logging your data on the online portal, you will be able to see your data presented in an accessible and engaging way. You are also able to filter repeat surveys by date or location and can see top littered items and composition breakdown of material types. If you click 'Download Data' it will present it in an editable excel spreadsheet for a more in depth analysis.

Upcoming events Past events Surveys Findings





Are you conducting a litter pick?

- Register your litter pick as an event on the Clean Up Scotland online portal.
- Consider what equipment you will need (e.g. litter pickers, gloves, bags, high vis vests, hand sanitiser etc). The amount of equipment will depend on how many people will be attending your event so you may need to keep track of the number of people attending.
- Contact your local authority to organise litter picking equipment for the event and arrange an uplift for the litter you collect.
- Ensure you consider the risks associated with your litter pick. We have guidance relating to risk assessments available on the [Community Litter Hub](#).
- On the day of your litter pick, it is important to carry out a health and safety briefing to volunteers before you start. Here is an [example of a briefing for guidance](#).
- Promote your activity to your broader community to get others involved, tagging @KSBSScotland and using hashtags #UpstreamBattle #MakeLitterCount.

3 top tips for planning your activity

1

Start with a list of key tasks over the weeks leading up to your event and put them in order from the earliest time they should happen.

2

Decide roles and responsibilities. Consider who is the manager/lead for your event and has the complete overview and will lead the process.

3

Good communication is key! You could set up a Whatsapp group to keep in touch with each other. Allocating a person responsible for emails is also a good idea.



How to organise an event

Think about making your Upstream Battle activity a wider community event or series of events - perhaps a more collaborative “Week of Action” with partners from across the community.

There are many different types of partners you could align with, such as venues; educational institutions; community and voluntary organisations; local businesses; clubs; campaigning groups; charities; environmental organisations; faith groups, development trusts; media outlets; arts and cultural institutions, sports clubs, and more. You might also want to liaise with your local council or MSP.

Case study : Upstream Battle 2024 week of action

Our Upstream Battle Week of Action took place from 20-28 January 2024. We wanted to use this week to spread awareness of marine litter, promote the campaign nationally and encourage as many marine litter surveys as possible. Despite wet and windy weather resulting in events planned for the beginning of the week being rescheduled, 10 events still went ahead across the country with 89 volunteers collecting 147 bags of rubbish and carrying out 96 marine litter surveys in total.



Velocity Café & Bicycle Workshop

Their Tuesday social cycle group carried out 12 marine litter surveys and collected 9 bags of litter along the Caledonian Canal, which flows into the Moray Firth. We chose the canal due to high water levels along the Ness after the storm.



Wick Path's Group

31 volunteers carried out 10 marine litter surveys along the River Wick. One of the volunteer's found a Fanta can with a ring pull, dating it as having been dropped sometime before 1989.



Scottish Coastal Clean Up

Despite the rain, four volunteers, including KSB chair, Tom Brock, completed four surveys along a 400m stretch of the River Esk and in just one 100m section alone we found an astonishing 66 drinks cans.

Create your own 'Week of Action'



Plan for multiple upstream battle activities (surveys and/or litter picks) on your local waterway.

This could be in multiple locations or over multiple days.



Identify potential partnerships in your area to support your activity.



Think about how you could coordinate several community groups to take action in a concentrated period.



Choose the time of year wisely – consider aligning with annual events (Earth Day, Climate Week etc), as appropriate.

How to create your own campaign within your community

If you are looking to expand on your activities to tackle marine litter, you could consider creating an ongoing campaign in your community.

A community campaign is a great way to raise awareness, take action and inspire others to do the same. We have detailed the 10 steps taken in creating the River Clyde Intervention campaign to offer guidance and inspiration for groups wanting to implement their own campaign locally.

Case study : River Clyde Intervention

We wanted to identify the most commonly littered items in the area to inform a targeted Intervention.

In December 2023, the Keep Scotland Beautiful Campaigns Team completed 23 surveys along the River Clyde. Seven surveys were conducted in the Cuningar Loop section on the north side of the river, which was then targeted for intervention due to the top three items found in this area being 'food and drink on-the-go' associated litter.

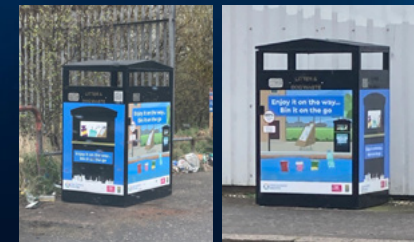
After identifying that the most littered items related to food on the go, intervention materials were designed to connect locals and visitors to this area. We used the key campaign message around the '80% of marine litter comes from land' as well as the message 'Enjoy it on the way... Bin it on the go' along the walkway as banners, a billboard and bin wraps.

Clyde Intervention 10 Steps

1. Collect, analyse and map out data (Google maps is a helpful resource for this)
2. Identify the landowner, land users, potential stressors (e.g. retailers in the area, busy school, commuters' route, busy road nearby, no bins, bins overflowing...)
3. Determine intervention budget and the potential costs of behaviour change interventions that could be effective and appropriate.
4. Create a proposal of the intervention and send it to the contacts that you either would like help from or cooperation from e.g. landowner/ local authority (in this case we worked closely with the council as it's their bins and path that they maintain and service).
5. Design the intervention materials – we have promotional materials you can use if you think they are appropriate e.g. 'Bin your butt', 'Give your litter a lift', marine litter (Upstream Battle), food on the go. Or design your own if you have the skills, time and budget.
6. Send artwork to the council for approval and make sure to add their logos to it as well.
7. If you are going to apply bin wraps, measure bins for the size of the wraps after receiving go ahead from the council
8. Order materials from our chosen suppliers
9. Along with help from the council and collaboration, put in place all the intervention materials
10. Plan to monitor the effectiveness of the pilot intervention by taking more surveys after the intervention has been in place for a chosen period.

Top 10 littered items

1. Plastic bottles
2. Plastic pieces
3. Plastic snack packets
4. Drinks cans
5. Polystyrene pieces
6. Cigarettes
7. Glass fragments
8. Dog poo
9. Plastic bags
10. Plastic bottle caps



How to communicate the campaign

Anyone and everyone can get involved with Upstream Battle. Whether you live near a waterway or further inland there are practical actions that anyone can do. Below are some ideas to get you started:

- Raise the issue of source to sea litter with others in the community and start 'making noise' about it on socials.
- Reach out to community groups in your area who are already doing litter-based activities. Have a look at our [Clean Up Scotland map](#) for Community Clean Up Hubs and events to find groups that are already active and participate in litter related activities.
- Join the Upstream Battle Action Facebook group to see what action is happening across Scotland, connect and share what you are finding on your local waterway.
- Create your own local Facebook group to provide a place for people interested in joining the fight against marine litter in your area to congregate.



Promotional tools - help us spread the message

We have a range of promotional materials for you to share with your community and supporters on your social media accounts, in your newsletters and blogs, on your noticeboards and at your events. Sharing your involvement in Upstream Battle on social media can help to publicise your event and spread the wider message. Here are a few ways that you can use social media platforms to increase interest in your Upstream Battle activities:



Social Media:

- Consistently sharing and re-sharing updates in the lead up to any upstream battle event is a great reminder for people wanting to attend.
- Posting photos and or/ making reels documenting the day and the amount of litter, types of litter and any unusual finds collected can make engaging and informative content.
- Using relevant and trending hashtags on posts such as #UpstreamBattle and #Source2Sea, as well as others related to your community will help to promote your activity.
- It can be helpful to tag local authorities and public figures to increase interest.
- Influencers will already have a large following so can help reach new audiences that might have not previously known about the campaign.

Posters:

- You can help raise awareness of the journey of marine litter by downloading our posters.

Eventbrite:

- Making an official event on Eventbrite can make it easier for you to track interest and to be able to reengage those who signed up when planning future events.

Media release:

- If you want to spread the word in your local paper, either before or after the event, you could prepare a media release. We encourage all those we work with to try and generate as much media coverage for their activities as possible. We have prepared [media guidance for communities](#).

Youth engagement

We want to help young people to understand that littering anywhere, even inland, still has impacts all the way downstream to the sea.

Young people of all ages can get involved with Upstream Battle through volunteering, by completing litter surveys and litter picks, as well as completing activities to raise awareness of the issues associated with litter in our waterways. We have provided some examples below of some ways in which young people can get involved in Upstream Battle.



Resources for young people

We have [resources for young people](#) of all ages to help raise awareness of the issues of source to sea litter.

For those with very young people looking for short activities to complete from home, we have activity sheets to take with you on a riverside walk to investigate the items you may see, and consider how they impact on the environment.

For young people in school, our educational activities include live lessons (including the lessons coming soon and pre-recorded lessons to watch again), school STEM challenges and other resources to be downloaded. These can all be accessed from our [education programme page](#).

Volunteering for young people

We encourage the involvement of all young people, including those at school as well as members of uniformed groups, including Girl Guiding, Sea Cadets, Boys Brigade and Scouting.

We want to support young people to start their volunteering journey by collecting citizen science to tackle source to sea litter.



Duke of Edinburgh volunteering

Participating in Keep Scotland Beautiful's Upstream Battle can form the volunteering component of your Duke of Edinburgh award. You can either volunteer by yourself or you can join a local litter picking group to complete your volunteering. This is a great and easy way to volunteer but you will also contribute to cleaning up your community and contribute to a national data set for Scotland.

Please read our Duke of Edinburgh Guidance for more information on how you can volunteer with Keep Scotland Beautiful. Our Upstream Battle survey guide will help you on your way then and create an account with us and start logging the data to record what litter you are finding on your local river. You can access all your surveys via the members portal which you can then use to report on your volunteering.

If you need any help getting started, please contact UpstreamBattle@KeepScotlandBeautiful.org

Case study: Duke of Edinburgh volunteering on River Forth

One student completed litter surveys (and litter picks) on the Allan Water, a tributary of the River Forth above Stirling, as part of his volunteering to achieve his Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award. Between December 2023 and April 2024, 15 surveys were completed along the same stretch of the Allan Water, each time litter picking the survey area.



"It was interesting to see how much litter there was in the area along the river. Doing the survey was not difficult and made me notice how much litter there actually was. It was nice to get rid of the litter and make the area cleaner"

Lachlan, Duke of Edinburgh Bronze

What was involved?

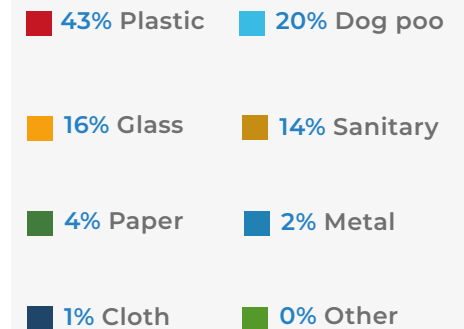
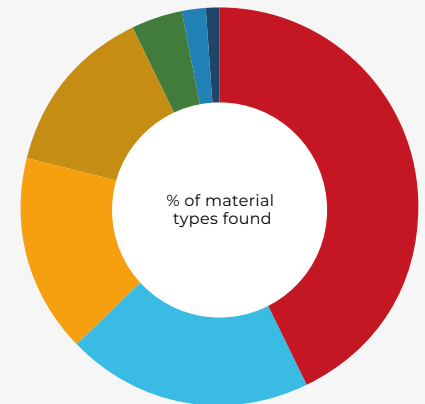


15
Upstream Battle® surveys



765
Items counted in total

Material types found



Scouts Scotland

We know that the young people involved in scouting are passionate about the environment. Using our Upstream Battle material for guidance, you can complete litter surveys and litter picks to help complete badges and awards, while also giving back to your community and contributing to our national litter data set.

Taking part in Upstream Battle and completing litter surveys and litter picking can count towards the Environmental Conservation Activity Badge, the Community Impact Staged Activity Badge as well as the World Challenge Award for either Cubs or Scouts. It is a great way for the young people to be exposed to the impacts of littering in their local environment and hopefully inspire them to start changing behaviours to reduce littering occurring in their community.

Our [Scouts Leaders Guide](#) will support you in taking the first steps with your group.

“Getting involved in Upstream Battle was a great way to meet one of the requirements (4f) for the Environmental Conservation Activity Badge. The Cubs loved litter picking as well as recording the litter they found along the local burn.”

Emma, Cub leader, Stirling.



Business engagement

We also love to work with businesses who want to take some practical action in their communities.

We can set up bespoke corporate events to suit your company's needs. Providing an event officer/s for the day, risk assessments, public liability insurance, safety/litter picking equipment and assistance with media/enquires.

We can also help you connect with community groups and your local authority to help you build connections for long-term collaborations in your area.

Find out more about how we can support your business on our [website](#).

“AtkinsRéalis participated in the Upstream Battle campaign by organising a surveying and litter picking day at Broomielaw near River Clyde. Despite the cold, it was an enriching experience helping our community clean its river and surrounding areas. The team bonded over the two activities and felt incredibly proud to have achieved a small but important feat to help the Upstream Battle campaign.”

Harshit Agrawal, AtkinsRéalis

Get in touch

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We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is your charity for Scotland's environment. We work with you to help combat climate change, reduce litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places. We aim to inspire changes in behaviour to improve our environment, the quality of people's lives, their wellbeing and the places that they care for.



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