

# Trail Talk Calendar: December 2023

## Topic: Leave No Trace Principle 3 - Dispose of Waste Properly

This month the conservation committee would like to promote the importance of disposing of waste while spending time in the great outdoors. We are asking Worcester Chapter activity leaders to promote this topic and to incorporate it into your pre-activity trail talk. This is the third of the seven principles of "Leave No Trace," and is crucial to protecting people, wildlife, and water resources from the negative impacts of pollution.



Here is some information to discuss with your group:

### **1.) Pack in and Pack out**

- Make sure that any item that you bring into the woods comes out with you. We do not want to leave any trash behind to pollute and harm the outdoor places we love. Instead, as stewards of the outdoors we want to leave the trail, campsite, or river better than we found it.
- Plan your trip supplies accordingly. You need to incorporate space in your pack for trash to travel with you.
- Picking up after yourself in the outdoors is every person's responsibility both ethically and legally.
- Be sure to carry trash bags in your pack to haul out trash.
- If you see someone else's trash scattered on the trail make an effort to pick it up. If every hiker picked up one piece of trash on the trail you would be surprised by the difference it would make.
- Remember do not burn trash. It can release toxins into the air, can impact the soil, and can attract wildlife to fire rings at campsites.

### **2.) Types of Trash**

- Organic/biodegradable waste - Food scraps, yard trimmings, pet waste, and human waste that can be broken down through natural processes.
- Solid/inorganic waste - Plastic, metal, glass, and other manmade textiles that are not biodegradable or would otherwise take a very long time.
- Recyclable waste - Cans, bottles, cardboard, and newspaper that can be reused into new manufactured products.
- Hazardous/toxic waste - Batteries, paint, chemicals, medical waste, radioactive waste that present a threat to both human and environmental health.

### 3.) How long does trash last?

- Orange or Banana Peel – Up to 2 Years.
- Cigarette Butts – 1 to 5 years.
- Leather or Wool – 1 to 5 years.
- Food wrappers and plastic coated paper – 5 years.
- Tin Cans – 50 years.
- Aluminum Cans – 80 to 100 years.
- Disposable Diapers – 450 years.
- Monofilament Fishing Line – 600 years.
- Glass Bottles – 1 million years!
- Plastic Bottles and Styrofoam – 500 years to unknown (studies vary)

### 4.) What to do with human waste?

Human waste carries bacteria, viruses and other organisms that can spread disease. Knowing how to correctly dispose of human waste when camping and on trails can help limit the spread of disease.

Cat holes:

- In most instances, the best way to dispose of solid waste is by digging a “cat hole.” Choose a spot at least 200 feet away from water, camp, and trails and dig a hole about 6 to 8 inches deep and about 4 to 6 inches wide. When done, cover the hole with dirt and other natural materials.
- Try to choose a spot that has rich, dark soil and gets plenty of sunlight. This will help quicken the rate of decomposition. Avoid elevated areas that might run into a stream during a rainstorm.
- Don’t use the same cat hole more than once. Instead, disperse the holes over the area.

Latrine:

- A latrine is another option for solid waste. It is most useful when camping for more than a few nights in one area, or when camping with young children. Because this option contains all the waste in one spot where the feces will decompose slowly, it’s very important to choose a location that will cause minimal impact to the environment.
- To choose an area and dig a latrine, follow the guidelines for a cat hole, but make the hole at least 12 inches long, depending on your group size. After each person uses the latrine, they will cover their waste with dirt. This helps speed up decomposition time.

Toilet paper:

- If you are using a cat hole, you can bury toilet paper or carry it out using a ziploc bag.
- If using a latrine, do not bury toilet paper. Use a bag to carry it out.
- Choose unscented toilet paper whenever possible.
- Never bury wipes, even if they are labeled biodegradable.

Urine:

- When urinating, go at least 200 feet from camp, water and trails.
- Although urine doesn't harm vegetation, it can attract animals. You can minimize this by urinating on rocks, gravel or pine needles and using water to dilute it.

Menstrual waste:

- All tampons and pads should be packed out in a plastic bag because they do not decompose.
- Waste from a menstrual cup can be buried in a cat hole using the same recommendations as for solid waste.

### **5.) How to dispose of campsite wastewater?**

- Do not wash dishes directly in a lake or stream. Instead choose a wash site that is at least 200 feet away from water sources.
- Soaps and lotions can affect water quality of streams and lakes, use soaps sparingly and rinse with a jug of clean water.
- Strain the dirty dishwater and scatter the remaining water away from the camp. Pack out the contents of the strainer along with any uneaten food.

References

<https://Int.org/why/7-principles/dispose-of-waste-properly/>

<https://trashcansdepot.com/blogs/news/the-different-types-of-garbage-and-how-to-dispose-of-them>

<https://Int.org/skills-series-trash-timeline/>