

Alice Ferguson Foundation's

# HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR OWN SCHOOLYARD CLEANUP



## About the Schoolyard Cleanup:

The Alice Ferguson Foundation’s Trash Free Potomac River Watershed Initiative presents a guiding document and activity for schools that are interested in conducting a litter cleanup on or near their school grounds. The Schoolyard Cleanup can be structured to be teacher/adult or student led, both with similar outcomes. This guide contains an activity and lesson outline for educators as well as a reading assignment-style document for students, which can be used to aid students in organizing a Schoolyard Cleanup or in conjunction with an adult-led cleanup.

A Schoolyard Cleanup can be an excellent tool to engage students in making a difference in their community directly. The education possibilities not only targets environmental issues, but math and reading skills as well. Conducting this event in conjunction with the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup can be a powerful way to involve your school on a larger scale, and can help enforce lessons learned by students through a Schoolyard Cleanup.



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# Organizing a Schoolyard Cleanup

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## Select a site

- You **must** receive principal/administration consent to clean up in that area.

- Do you have adults that are willing to help supervise the site?

*If you choose to register the site with the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative, (TFPWI), then site decisions must be made:*

- Parking availability
- Whether your site will be open to all volunteers or closed to your school group only

## Assess the site

*Accessibility:*

- Will everybody be able to get to your site?
- Where will volunteers park?
- Is there an event going on near your cleanup date that will change the layout? (such as a sporting event)
- Will it be easy to transport trash off your site (trash removal is your responsibility)?

*Safety:*

- Are there any hazards such as steep banks, poison ivy, slippery rocks, broken glass, or sharp metal objects?
- What can you do to minimize the hazards at your site? Or should you investigate a different site?

*Ecology:*

- Look for sensitive features: check for animal homes or nests that need to be avoided
- Avoid areas with rare or abundant plants that could be trampled

*Size:*

- If your site is large, divide the area into mini sites with a leader or group in charge of each area.

If you choose to be an official site of the cleanup, now is the time to **register with TFPWI:**

Visit [www.fergusonfoundation.org](http://www.fergusonfoundation.org) and click on the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup tab to register, or:

Download a registration form and mail or fax it to Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF); or: Call AFF at 202-972-8203 to register over the phone

## Recruit

- Recruit volunteers at your school
- Post flyers in your area
- Talk to people; ask them to join
- Make an announcement over the PA system

## Supplies

- If your site is going to be a registered TFPWI site, supplies are provided on the condition that you register by the deadline in March as found on the website: [www.potomaccleanup.org](http://www.potomaccleanup.org) and your cleanup is scheduled for the month of April.
- AFF provides: yellow (trash) and blue (recyclables) bags, gloves, data sheets, planning guides and safety information
- You need to choose a distribution center nearest you to pick up your supplies. Call the Alice Ferguson Foundation ahead of time to find out where and when to receive them: 202-972-8203
- If you are **NOT** registering with TFPWI, they need to be acquired on your own time and budget.

## Arrange For Disposal

- Talk with your school's janitorial staff to confirm places to set your trash for collection
- Ask them when/where it would be convenient for them to pick up your trash, and set a time for them to collect it.

### *Recyclables:*

- Will your trash removal plan include recycling blue-bagged containers?
- Can you or a volunteer take the recyclables to a local recycling facility, drop off center or home for curbside pick-up?

## Trash Collection: Recyclables

- Ensure that blue bags are used for recyclables; make sure you know which items can be considered recyclable and those that cannot.
- If contaminated\*\*, recyclable bags (blue) should be reported on the data sheet and disposed with trash.

### *Separating Recyclable Materials*

- How will you organize students to separate recyclables?
- How will you identify contaminated recyclables from clean recyclables?
- Who will be in charge of recyclables recovery?
- Can you recycle tires and scrap metal by contacting your county landfill?
- See "Recyclable Recovery Procedures" for more information.

\*Separating is important for both education and data collection

\*Alice Ferguson Foundation would like all sites to recycle the containers collected. However, this is often not possible due to contamination from dirt, unknown liquid, oils, etc.

## Data Collection

*It is important to have at least one member of your group in charge of data, and to organize a method of recording data for:*

- Count number of yellow and blue bags (unused and used)
- Estimate pounds of loose trash (items too large to fit in bags)
- Establish other items of interest you would like to collect information on (top three brand names found, plastic bags, cigarette butts)

*Visit the TFPWI website for data sheets to tally trash found at the cleanup:*

[http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_volunteertrashtallysheet.pdf](http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash_initiative/rc_volunteertrashtallysheet.pdf)

## Safety/HAZMAT

- Read safety and HAZMAT guidelines:  
[http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_safety.shtml](http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash_initiative/rc_safety.shtml)
- Familiarize yourself with sharps/disposal  
[http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_sharps.shtml](http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash_initiative/rc_sharps.shtml)
- Make sure you have a container ready for these materials. Use these printable HAZMAT labels for identification:  
[http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_hazmatlabels.pdf](http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash_initiative/rc_hazmatlabels.pdf)

## Organize Classroom Lesson

- Read over the classroom prep, cleanup activity, and reflection activity sections to become familiar with the timing and materials needed.
- The preparation/introduction may need to occur the day before the cleanup

**TIP:** If you are interested in creating a student-led schoolyard cleanup, consider having interested students attend an offsite TFPWI cleanup site. Students can then bring back knowledge about how the cleanup works and teach their fellow students at your schoolyard cleanup. **Service-Learning Graduation Requirement Alert!** Your students can receive service hours for participating in the Schoolyard Cleanup or the Trash Free Potomac Cleanup.

**Checklist for Schoolyard Cleanup Organizer:**

<b>Step</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Select Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get permission from principal/administration</li> <li>• If registering with TFPWI, establish parking and whether it will be an open or closed site</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Assess Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the area for any unsafe conditions</li> <li>• Ensure it is accessible for all participants</li> <li>• Plan layout of event, be aware of any events going on around date that may affect</li> <li>• Scout area for any ecology to avoid (animals, native/rare plants)</li> <li>• Make note of size of area, plan for division if necessary</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Register your site with TFPWI	Contact AFF to register
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post flyers, talk to people</li> <li>• Make announcements over loud system</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Supplies	Either through AFF, or acquired on your own if not registered
<input type="checkbox"/> Organize Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to janitorial staff to arrange time and place for pick up and disposal</li> <li>• Decide whether you will recycle recyclable items</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Trash Collection: Recyclables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure you know which items are considered recyclable</li> <li>• Define what is a contaminated versus clean recyclable</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Data Collection	Ensure you have a tracking system in place for recording bags, large items, and items of interest
<input type="checkbox"/> Safety/HAZMAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read guidelines on AFF website for safety guidelines and HAZMAT information</li> <li>• Create a deposit for HAZMAT materials</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Organize Classroom Lesson	Prepare for the introductory lesson and set aside time to complete the section before your scheduled cleanup



## Schoolyard Cleanup Activity Plan

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- Overview**
- Students will review definitions of a watershed, trash, and the 4R's.
  - Students will explore the significance of trash in their lives.
  - Students will engage in litter cleanup exercise and record data, with post-cleanup reflection and discussion.

**Lesson Characteristics** Use the table below for lesson planning purposes.

Time Required	Part 1, Introduction: 45 minutes-1 hour Part 2, Cleanup and Tally: 1 hour+
Key Concepts/Terms	Watershed; Trash and Litter; Connection of people to environment; 4 R's: Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
Prerequisites	Teachers: complete "How To Organize a Schoolyard Cleanup"
Setting	Part 1: indoors, with computer access Part 2: outdoors (cleanup), indoors (tally/reflection)

**Learning Objectives** After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain the concept of a watershed and the impacts of trash and litter on water, ecosystems, and people
- Recognize where drinking water comes from and describe how trash impacts the quality of our drinking water
- Identify what trash items can be recycled
- Make environmentally responsible decisions about their trash consumption in order to positively impact the health of their environment.

**Materials Needed** The table below lists the materials needed to conduct this activity.

	Items Needed for the Whole Class	Items Needed for Each Group
<b>Part 1 (Introduction)</b>	Internet access	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Part 2 (Cleanup)</b> <i>Note: for those schools registering their cleanup site with the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup, many of these supplies will be provided for you.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total trash tally sheet</li> <li>• HAZMAT/sharps container (one per adult)</li> <li>• Gloves for each student/adult dealing with trash</li> <li>• Timer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trash bag for recyclables and trash</li> <li>• Trash tally sheet</li> <li>• Clipboard</li> <li>• Watch/timer</li> </ul>

**Background Information**

Trash is a serious problem in the Potomac River Watershed, and its major tributaries. Trash travels from our streets into storm drains and waterways until it reaches the Potomac. While there is currently limited research or regional data that tracks the sources of regional trash, we speculate that the majority of this trash originates as refuse improperly or intentionally disposed of along roadsides and in public and private open spaces. Trash...

- that ends up on the ground often times finds its way into the Potomac River or one of its tributaries such as the Anacostia or Rock Creek;
- can clog public sewer systems and become entangled in creeks, creating a 'damming effect' which traps debris, wildlife, and prevents water flow;
- negatively impacts community aesthetic and well-being;
- interferes with public use and enjoyment of river and streamside parks;
- can have significant negative chemical and biological impacts including: leaking and/or leaching of toxics from certain types of disposed items such as used oil quart containers, oil filters and car batteries;
- can interfere with the establishment of emergent aquatic plants;
- can be hazardous to wildlife through ingestion of or entanglement in floating debris;
- costs regional jurisdictions millions of dollars each year to clean up, money that can be better spent on more worthy causes such as education, recycling efforts, etc.;
- contributes to filth, bacteria, and toxins harmful to you and those you love.

Facts about the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup:

- The average American throws out 5 pounds of trash per day (Metropolitan Washington Council Of Governments)
- Over 14,000 volunteers collected 252 tons of trash from over 275 sites at the 2010 Potomac River Watershed Cleanup
- Of that trash, 19% was comprised of materials that could have been recycled
- If we don't stop this trash in our own neighborhoods, it will make its way to the Potomac River, which is the source of drinking water for residents in the Metropolitan District of Columbia area.

The Trash Free Schools project created by the Alice Ferguson Foundation is an excellent way to keep the conversation about waste reduction and litter alive in your school. Visit <http://fergusonfoundation.org/trashfreeschools.shtml> for more information.



**Procedure**

Follow the steps in the table below to conduct the activity.

**Part 1: Introduction**

Phase	Step	Action
Engage	1	<b>Ask: "What is a watershed? What do you want to know about watersheds?"</b> Record student answers. Answers can be recorded in a KWL chart.
	2	<b>Ask: "What is trash? Is trash a problem to you? What do you wonder about trash?"</b> Record student answers, adding to the KWL chart.  <div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 0 10px;"> <b>TIP:</b> There is potential here to have students save a day's worth of their trash and classify and weigh it to compare to the results found in the schoolyard cleanup.         </div>
Explore	3	<b>Say: "We are now going to find out what a watershed really is."</b> Visit "The Ways of a Watershed" online lesson: <a href="http://fergusonfoundation.org/hbf/raindrop_roadtrip/index.shtml">http://fergusonfoundation.org/hbf/raindrop_roadtrip/index.shtml</a>
Explain	4	<b>Revisit student answers about trash. Add information that students learned to the KWL chart. Were student questions answered? Share facts about the cleanup (see background information in this lesson plan). Mention environmental problems associated with trash.</b> <b>Ask: "Where does your tap water come from?"</b> Some students will say "WSSC," "DC Water," or "a water treatment facility." Challenge them to understand that most of the tap water in the District of Columbia Metropolitan region comes from the Potomac River. It starts there, goes through a water purification facility, and then is brought to our taps by DC Water. The cleaner our water is to begin with, the easier and less expensive it is to be made safe for us to drink. The more polluted our water is, the more difficult (more expensive) it is to purify. There is a finite amount of water on our planet; we cannot create more water. Your tax dollars are hard at work making fresh water safe for consumption.
	5	Introduce the 4R's: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rethink: Visit "Nature Recycles, Shouldn't We All?" online lesson: <a href="http://fergusonfoundation.org/hbf/nature_recycles/trashlesslunch.shtml">http://fergusonfoundation.org/hbf/nature_recycles/trashlesslunch.shtml</a>
	6	<b>Discuss: "What can we do to reduce trash?"</b> <i>Stop using certain materials, recycle, reuse, cleanup what is already out there</i> Answers can be added to the KWL chart.

	7	Say: "We are going to help reduce trash in our watershed by cleaning up our schoolyard."
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## Part 2: Schoolyard Cleanup

Note: The main objective is for students to beautify their schoolyard by removing trash. If you like, have students separate recyclable drink containers from "other" trash. You can also have students consider the most common brand names that they see and keep track of the number of plastic bags they find. The amount of detail you take in tracking this trash is up to you. Use the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup Trash Tally Sheet as your guide.

\*If you are not registered as an official cleanup site, or would like another format for your students to record data, refer to the attached Trash Tally Sheet.

Phase	Step	Action
Elaborate	8	<p><b>Safety Talk with all students (<i>Note: it is recommended that the safety talk be discussed indoors with students' captive attention</i>):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students DO NOT pick up sharp objects, including broken glass and needles. They go in a sharps container. Students should call an adult over to handle these items.</li> <li>• Students DO NOT pick up aerosol containers, including spray paint and hairspray. They are disposed of separately because they may burst. Students should call an adult over to handle these items.</li> <li>• DO NOT empty any bottles that contain liquid. Though they may contain the same innocuous liquid as described on the label, they may also contain a foreign liquid that cannot be identified and may be unsanitary. Keep lids on!</li> </ul> <p>Discuss any possible hazard areas, like steep sections or slippery spots, and inform of possible dangerous plants or animals/insects (poison ivy/oak, ticks, bees).</p>
Elaborate	9	<p><b>Logistics</b></p> <p>Discuss special items, e.g. recyclables, brand names, plastic bags, etc. that you would like students to keep track of. Alternatively, students may choose which items they think are particular problems in your schoolyard and may decide to track those items of choice. Review trash tally method/sheet.</p> <p>Organize locations for each student/group to focus on, and specify the area boundaries. Make sure everybody understands, and set a time limit (or until all the trash is cleared; whichever comes first).</p>

	10	<p><b>Distribute materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is suggested that students work in groups with roles (such as note-taking/tallying, supplies organizer, timer, boundary monitor, etc.) to ensure everybody is involved. This also makes for better tracking.</li> <li>Each group or participant receives: a pair of gloves, trash bags (one yellow for trash, one blue for recyclables), and a sheet to tally trash (<a href="http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash_initiative/rc_volunteertrash_tallysheet.pdf">http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash_initiative/rc_volunteertrash_tallysheet.pdf</a>). Adult leaders receive one sharps container each in addition.</li> </ul>
	11	<p><b>Picking up and cleaning up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let students disperse to collect; once an area is cleared, have students reassemble.</li> <li>Consolidate items from un-filled bags into full bags</li> <li>Flatten emptied bags and fold together to be reused.</li> </ul>
	12	<p><b>Weighing:</b> could be done indoors to keep attention</p> <p>Have each group record the number of bags, weigh and record the weight of any loose trash, and place all trash in the appropriate area for removal.</p>
Evaluate	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combine the individual group counts into a class Trash Tally (including any special items defined) **if registered with the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup, gather and submit Trash Tally sheet to the appropriate contact person.**</li> <li>Look at the amounts of trash, and review the types of trash found. Discuss where students think the trash came from. Tie into definition of watershed, and where the trash would have gone if it was not picked up (harmed wildlife, clogged storm drains, into water treatment plant).</li> </ul>
	14	<p><b>Student reflection</b> (can be written or verbal): "What can you do each day to reduce the amount of trash you produce?" and "How do you feel about your experience today?" *There is possibility here to have students share their reflections with the class. AFF would also love to receive sample reflections if you have the opportunity to pass them along!</p>
Optional Elaboration		<p>If you would like to incorporate a math activity into the cleanup, visit the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative's website for data: <a href="http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash_initiative/trash_cleanup.shtml">http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash_initiative/trash_cleanup.shtml</a> and look for the sidebar "Data &amp; Results". You can compare the numbers and percentages from various years, and create graphs and charts based on the data.</p>

Individual/Group Special Trash Tally Worksheet

<b>Type of Trash</b> (Brand name, plastic bag, cigarette butts, etc.)	<b>Tally</b>	<b>Total Number</b>
<i>Example:</i> <b>Plastic Bags</b>	IIII	4

How many trash bags did you fill? \_\_\_\_\_

How many recyclable bags did you fill? \_\_\_\_\_

## A “Litter” Cleaning Goes a Long Way: How to Organize Your Own Schoolyard Cleanup

You see it every day: trash on the streets, in yards and on sidewalks, at the playground and on sport fields, maybe even at your school! Your first idea may be to ignore it. You did not put it there, why should you clean it up?

WELL, GUESS WHAT: That little piece of **Styrofoam** or **plastic** bottle on the ground is going to affect your life more than you may think. Here is what we know: garbage is gross, there is nothing good about litter...but there are more important reasons to clean up litter besides making an area look nice.



### Did you know?

It takes about 450 years for a plastic bottle to **degrade** (break down into most simple forms).

Styrofoam often breaks down into pieces so little that animals confuse it for food, eat it, and get very sick.

The Alice Ferguson Foundation’s annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup brings out thousands of volunteers from throughout the **watershed** to collect incredible amounts of litter! For more detailed data on past cleanups, visit [www.potomaccleanup.org](http://www.potomaccleanup.org).



We all **consume** products and throw things away every day. This information is not to make people feel bad or guilty about throwing that gum wrapper in the trash, but encourage everyone to be responsible not only for their own habits but also to educate their peers about how to reduce litter, reuse materials instead of throwing them away and especially to **RECYCLE!!!!**

### The Trash Bag Pep Rally: Get Excited!

You and your schoolmates are on the way to making a HUGE difference in both your community and environment! You can get service-learning hours for graduation! And you know what the best part is? IT IS EASY AND SUPER FUN!!!

You may be asking how picking up trash could possibly be any fun. Well, for starters, you get to spend time with your friends doing something different! You would also be surprised at all the interesting items you might find; such as things from a long time ago, maybe even before you or your parents were born!

But just as important as having fun...we all know how great it is to do something to help someone out and make the world a better place one step at a time. By participating in a cleanup you are not only going to feel great about the awesome job you and your schoolmates did picking up loads of trash, but you get the added bonus of knowing that you're effort has helped improve the health of both your community and your environment.

### Time to Get Down and Dirty!

Now it is time for some action! Keep on reading to find out how you and your classmates are





going to rock the house and have an awesome cleanup!

Before anything else...**Assemble Your Squad!!!**

You can successfully complete a schoolyard cleanup with ANY NUMBER OF STUDENTS! There is no limit to how many kids can get involved. However, if there are A LOT of kids involved, it would be good to break up into teams and have team leaders.

## The P's and Q's of T R A S H

There are a few things to think about before you start picking up trash:

**1. What are the goals of your cleanup?** Think about questions like: How much trash do you want to pick up? How much time do you want to spend picking up trash? Do you want to clean your whole school grounds, or just one spot? Do you want to use the results for a special project or news article?



**2. When are you going to have this event?** (Note: this is very important not only for students participating in the event, but also for adults who need to supervise and the school principle, teachers, and administration to know what's going on.)

REMEMBER: YOU HAVE TO GET APPROVAL FROM YOUR SCHOOL BEFORE YOU CONDUCT A CLEANUP!

**3. Are there special forms you need to fill out for the school before you have this event?** Teachers and club leaders should talk to school administration about the process of having an event like this on school property.

**4. How many students can participate?** Is this cleanup going to be conducted by only one class or a specific club? If it is open to everyone, how many people can get involved? (This depends on how large your cleanup site is and how much litter is present)



## 5. GET THE WORD OUT!!!

Motivate your students/classmates to take part in this event. You could even make it a competition between classes or groups to see who can get the most.

**6. SAFETY FIRST!!!** Everyone MUST be aware of the proper ways to dispose of hazardous materials. To view safety guidelines please visit

[http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_supplies.shtml](http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash_initiative/rc_supplies.shtml)

[up.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_supplies.shtml](http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash_initiative/rc_supplies.shtml)

**7. How will you dispose of the trash/ recycled materials you've collected?** This step is very important. You do not want to work hard collecting loads of trash only to have a huge pile still on the curb when you show up the next week! Talk to your school janitors about whether or not you can throw your trash in school dumpsters or if you need to call someone to pick it up. County Waste Management is willing to help answer all your questions. For a list of contact information for your county or city please visit

[http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_supplies.shtml](http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash_initiative/rc_supplies.shtml)

Great! You have done all the background work to make your cleanup a success. Now all you have to do is get out there and **pick it up!**

Should you report what you found? You bet! **Count how much trash you found, weigh it if possible, and report how many bags of recyclables you collected.** After you have written out all of your information, report your results to either the Alice Ferguson Foundation or other interested parties. Visit [http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_details.shtml](http://www.potomaccleanup.org/trash_initiative/rc_details.shtml) for the official Potomac River Watershed Cleanup Trash Tally sheet.





## The Giant Group Hug!!

It is over! You did it! Look at everything you've collected! Whew...take a moment to relish in your victory.

Teachers and Adults:  
Make sure you acknowledge the hard work of your students. Tell them they did a great job

and their efforts today have really paid off in making the environment both safer and healthier for everyone living in it. For more detailed guidance on organizing a Schoolyard Cleanup, download the Schoolyard Cleanup Guide for Teachers/Adults from the Resources tab on the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup website, [www.potomaccleanup.org](http://www.potomaccleanup.org).

**In summary, make sure you take care of the following points:**

- Get your team together and work out all of the logistics.
- Get materials for your cleanup: trash bags (or grocery bags for little kids) and gloves.
- Make sure you have a First-Aid kit, Hazmat Containers for sharp items, water for drinking or washing hands.
- Optional: borrow a cart or wheelbarrow to move bags to one area for easy pickup.
- Dispose of your trash properly
- Collect unused bags and gloves to use again
- Record data of cleanup: date, school, site, participants, how much trash and what types were most common. Learn more about reporting results at [http://www.fergusonfoundation.org/trash\\_initiative/rc\\_reportdata.shtml](http://www.fergusonfoundation.org/trash_initiative/rc_reportdata.shtml)

For more information about the Alice Ferguson Foundation and its programs and initiatives, please visit our website: [www.fergusonfoundation.org](http://www.fergusonfoundation.org)