

Hiding in Plain Sight: Everything We Need to Clean Up Environment is on the Streets

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Purpose: To show people of all ages how easily a game can be made of cleaning up the (urban) landscape through Recycling Away From Home (RAH!)

Project Description: It is called "Hiding In Plain Sight: Everything We Need To Clean Up The Environment Is On The Streets." (Alternate name: "The Streets Are Paved With Gold")

This is an activity in which any number of people can play, even just one person though the more the merrier.

Early spring is the perfect time of year to attempt this game, devoted to preventing unnecessary flushing of trash into the storm sewer system while separating recyclables from mixed trash for proper disposal of all materials. As the snow and ice piles melt down, treasures appear everywhere.

One person or a group sets out to walk in a predetermined area, 5 square blocks for example.

You do not need to carry anything for success. In fact fewer items carried at the start makes more flexible players successful as collection proceeds. Wearing good hiking shoes/wet-boots and flexible gloves (rubber gardening gloves are best) and clothes which you would not mind dirtying are the only requirements for this project. People could do it on the way home from Dane County Farmers Market for example

The leader sets a goal such as "Let's see if we can find 10 aluminum cans, 15 plastic beverage bottles, one paper bag, and 3 plastic bags as minimum for scoring in the game." The trip out will follow a path, which will also be the return path. Give yourself about 30 minutes to cover the distance in case you get really involved. (I have done this game on city streets, in parks, and along highway entrance and exit ramps. I do not recommend the highway areas for children or those who are afraid of traffic.) On one occasion I found \$23 in cash blowing in and under bushes. Near The Kohl Center I collect substantial cash-value in aluminum cans. Aluminum is at an all-time high for cash-in value at Madison Recycling Center on Fish Hatchery Rd.

Then you set out on your walk looking around within reach for trash along sidewalks, in bushes, and just in sight in the gutter. No one needs to go anywhere or handle anything that makes them uncomfortable. No one needs to trespass or go into traffic.

The first thing to look for is the paper and/or plastic bags. Even if you pass by some other object to be retrieved go for the bags first. This way you need not place soiled stuff in your pockets (unless you want to do so!).

LOOK EVERYWHERE. Notice the preponderance of plastic bags! Pick one up, shake it out. Look for a 2nd bag. Now you have a pouch for carrying the recyclables and one for the yucky other stuff. WOW! There's an aluminum can sticking out of the snow or mud. Pick it up, crush it with your boot, and place in the bag. Now find 9 more along the way. UH-OH.... there's a dirty food wrapper with a plastic soda bottle. Pick them up, pull them apart, and put the wrapper in one bag for mixed trash disposal. Save the plastic bottle for recycling. HEY THERE'S A TRASH CAN HERE ON THE STREET?! Empty the dirty trash in the trash bin. If there is no recycling bin take the recyclables home for City of Madison Single Steam Pick-Up every 2nd week.

GET IT? It can be fun, and provides mild aerobic exercise too.

CONTINUE AND REPEAT.

Benefits:

Teaches that the environment (streets, parks, etc.) is a place of community pride, and has value no matter how small an effort. Being Green is everyone's' clean-up responsibility, not just the government and large environmental organizations. It is a good exercise and embraces the concept of Recycling Away From Home. And it's FUN!