



SCA Human Sanitation Guide to Good Practice

Paddlers spend a lot of their time either on or beside water. The enjoyment of their activity depends on water being clean and as far as possible free from risks to health. It is vital that paddlers don't pollute the water they paddle on and camp beside, when they answer the call of nature.

It is a vital outdoor skill to deal with human waste in a hygienic and environmentally sensitive way.

Toilet Hygiene



DO:

- Find a spot at least 30m (about 100 feet) from fresh/running water when going to the toilet
- When camping by the sea it is advisable to urinate/defaecate below the highwater line so that the incoming tide will flush away your human waste. Care and discretion need to be used to ensure that you don't cause health hazards for others or pollute sensitive areas.
- In inland areas bury excrement in a small hole (not under boulders). A trowel can be used to lift a flap of turf. Pay attention to burying excrement properly,

particularly when the ground is frozen or covered in snow.

- If a suitable place cannot be found then you must bag your waste and carry it out.
- Use natural materials in the place of toilet paper, such as moss, grass and seaweed.
- If you use toilet paper then pack it out in small plastic bags. Burning toilet paper is not recommended as it is not easy to burn and may create a fire hazard.

DO NOT:

- Use areas of sensitive vegetation such as west coast machair – this vegetation takes a long time to recover so holes should not be dug at all. Find a more suitable place.
- Burying toilet paper isn't recommended as it takes a long time to biodegrade.

- Burying tampons and sanitary towels is not acceptable as animals will dig these up. Carry these out in plastic bags. Placing in a container with a tea bag helps to reduce any odours.

HUMAN SANITATION IS NOT A TABOO SUBJECT: PLEASE DISCUSS WITH YOUR FELLOW PADDLERS!

Protecting and Using Fresh Water

You need to consider that a burn (stream) may be the water supply for a remote house. It may also be your water source if camping.

- Make sure you are at least 30 metres away from any running water when you defecate.
- When camping, always take drinking water from above your site, and walk downhill and away from water, to defecate.
- When taking drinking water from a burn always check for at least 30 metres above the point of extraction for contamination.
- Although urine is less harmful than excrement, its smell is unpleasant. Avoid urinating near fresh water.
- Use a biodegradable soap for washing pans / yourself, but don't use it directly in the burn.

Options for the Disposal of Excrement

This advice describes methods for disposing of human excrement in the outdoors:

- Burial
- Disposal in the sea
- Carrying out

It is important to know about the different methods and develop the ability to judge which is best in a given set of circumstances. Remoteness, proximity to fresh water and the likelihood of other people visiting the same place are factors to take into consideration when deciding which method to use.

BE DISCREET: Find a place that is private for you, and which also respects the sensitivities of others who may live, work or be taking their recreation in the area. Defecate at least 50 metres from paths and 200 metres from huts and bothies.

Burial of Human Excrement

Excrement decomposes faster if covered with soil and leaf mould. This also discourages animals from digging it up. Whenever possible, dig a 15 centimetre (6") deep hole and bury your excrement. Carry a hand trowel for this purpose.

Avoid digging or spreading in sensitive vegetation, such as on machair. Be aware of sensitive sites and avoid using them as a toilet.

When snow lies on the ground, remove it and, dig down into the soil and bury as per the guidance above. Burying your excrement in the snow is only temporary until the snow melts. Carrying your excrement out is the best method when there is snow and frost on the ground.

Disposal in the sea

It is usually considered acceptable to use the rising and falling tides to flush away human excrement as the sea is a huge body of water, but you should always think about the best place to do this and think about the negative consequences if you were to use the wrong place.

Do:

- Defecate directly into the sea; or onto a rock and then throw the rock into the sea; or when the tide is rising, onto rocks or the beach so that the tide will soon rise above the excrement and carry it away.
- Get as far away as possible from local houses, as well as your camping spot and colleagues.
- It is preferable to urinate below the high-water mark at all stages of the tide.
- Carry out toilet paper and sanitary items

Don't:

- Defaecate in enclosed bays where the tide may wash your excrement onto a beach rather than flushing it out to sea. In these circumstances it may be preferable to bury your excrement on land or to carry it out.
- Defaecate in an area with shellfish farming in the vicinity. Norovirus and Cryptosporidium can be absorbed by filter feeders such as oysters and mussels.

Carrying Out

In some areas of the World, travellers are required to carry out their excrement. Whilst Britain has lagged behind in embracing this practice, carry out techniques in Scotland have been pioneered in recent years by Glenmore Lodge and the Cairngorms Ranger Service. With the right equipment carrying out excrement for disposal at home is the most environmentally sensitive method.

The suggested technique is:

- To defecate onto paper; wrap it up; place into a plastic bag; tie the plastic bag and place in a tight sealing plastic container, such as a small BDH bottle.
- At home the contents of the container can be taken out of the plastic bag & flushed down the toilet, the plastic bag deposited into a domestic waste bin and the container washed out and disinfected ready for the next trip.

- It is good practice to clearly mark what the container is for and to keep that bottle, and its lid, for that specific purpose.
- Make sure you thoroughly wash your hands afterwards / use hand sanitizer.

Toilet Paper

Whenever possible use natural materials in place of paper: grass, moss and seaweed are good natural alternatives.

If you do use toilet paper it is preferable to pack it out in a couple of small plastic bags. Burning toilet paper is not recommended as it is difficult to get it all to burn and it may be a fire hazard. Toilet paper takes time to decompose, so burying it is not recommended.

Female Sanitary Items

Use a secure container, such as a self-seal bag, to carry them out. Putting a used tea bag in the same container can help absorb any smell. Do not bury sanitary items as they take a long time to decompose and may be dug up by animals.

Toilet Provision

Never miss an opportunity to use a proper toilet. Dry or composting toilets are sometimes available in remote locations. Where these are found it is important to read any instructions and follow them clearly. If they aren't used properly, they don't function. Most composting toilets use a covering of woodchips (supplied in the cabin), and should not have any chemicals, toilet paper or other items added.

General Hygiene

It is essential to wash hands after defecating, even in the outdoors, so ensure you make the effort, particularly before handling food. The consequences of becoming ill in remote areas are more serious than at home. A small hand sanitizer in your day bag may be very useful.

Communicable Diseases

Cryptosporidium, Campylobacter, E. coli O157 and Giardia are all gut pathogens that can be caught from drinking contaminated water. The numbers of cases are generally low, but it is wise to remember that carelessness could result in debilitating conditions. Drinking water contaminated with Cryptosporidium parasites is an internationally recognised risk factor for human illness. Contamination can arise from a variety of sources including oocysts (infectious stage) from infected humans, livestock, and feral animals present in the catchment. Oocysts remain infectious in

the environment and water for prolonged periods and are resistant to most disinfectants used to treat drinking water.

Further Reading

'How to Shit in the Woods' by Kathleen Meyer, Ten Speed Press.

'Up Shit Creek' by Joe Lindsay, Ten Speed Press.

'Camping Healthy - Hygiene for the Outdoors' by Buck Tilton and Rick Bennett, ICS Books.

'Sewage Solutions – Answering the Call of Nature' by Nick Grant, Mark Moodie and Chris Weedon, Centre for Alternative Technology Publications.

'Lifting the Lid: An Ecological Approach to Toilet Systems' by Peter Harper & Louise Halestrap, Centre for Alternative Technology Publications.

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This information is adapted from that provided by [Mountaineering Scotland](https://www.mountaineering-scotland.co.uk/) and is available on their website

