



Dispose of Waste Properly: “Would You Drink It?”

Audience: 6 years old and up. Groups of any size.

Time: 15 to 20 minutes.

Materials: Liquid soap (does not have to be biodegradable, but will be called such for the purposes of the activity), bug spray, sunscreen, pieces of food scraps or bits commonly found on someone’s plate, a clear cup or jar, and a water bottle full of drinkable water.

Leave No Trace Objective: To illustrate the impacts of common camping and recreation items on water sources.

Directions: Take a clean glass of water, show it to the group and tell them what the glass contains. Then ask the group, or a few of the individuals within the group, “Would you drink this water?” Discuss their answer, which 100% of the time will be “yes.” Now, take out the liquid soap— mention that it is biodegradable and that many people use this type of soap to clean themselves as well as dishes when camping. Then add a small amount of soap to the water and stir it. Ask the group once again, “Would you drink the water?” Discuss why or why not. Repeat for the bug spray, sunscreen, food scraps and any other item that you choose to include in the activity.

IMPORTANT NOTE FROM THE EDITORS: Keep in mind that participants should NEVER actually consume the tainted water, despite the gleeful acceptance from the one participant in your group who would drink motor oil if put up to the challenge.

Debrief: Discuss how easy it is for people to impact water quality with common items they use while camping or spending time outside. What are some possible solutions or alternatives to using these items for our comfort and safety without contaminating water sources?