

14 WINTER CAMPING SANITATION

Let's face it – it is tough to contemplate washing up when winter camping, but that doesn't mean that sanitation should be ignored. As a winter campers you will have a different definition of 'clean' than you will at home. Winter camping 'clean' means dry, free from debris and hygienic.

14.1 PERSONAL SANITATION

For some people, camping is a good excuse to get dirty, but if you are out for an extended time, wash. As the backwoods trapper says "Wash down as far as possible, then wash up as far as possible; finally wash 'ole' possible." The obvious solution is to clean up using hot water and soap, but preparing hot water becomes a hassle out there. It's easier to mix a teaspoon of bleach in water.

You can use a multi-purpose soap, hand sanitizer, antiseptic wipe or try a pre-packaged wipe; these are usually hypoallergenic, have an antibacterial formula and contain aloe vera to minimize skin irritation. Of course, the pre-packaged wipes may freeze in your pack, so you will need to take them out and thaw them prior to use.

In some situations, you may be able to take a snow bath. Take a handful of snow and wash your body where sweat and moisture accumulate, such as under the arms and between the legs, and then wipe yourself dry.

Especially take care of your feet. If possible, wash your feet daily and put on clean, dry socks. Clean and dry your feet and wear dry socks in camp or to sleep in overnight.

Don't forget to floss and brush your teeth. Dental floss is light to carry and useful for other purposes.

14.2 CLEANING YOUR CLOTHES

Dirty clothes may smell and have an offensive appearance, but the real reason to keep your clothes clean is the possibility of chafing and reduced performance of the fabric. Dirty clothes can reduce breathability or loft of your clothes. Since insulation is effective when heat is trapped by dead air spaces, keep your insulating layers clean and fluffy. Dirt, grime, and perspiration can mat down those air spaces and reduce the warmth of a garment.

Change and/or clean your underwear at least twice a week. If you are unable to wash your underwear, take it off, shake it and let it air out for an hour or two.

Dry your socks and shake them out to extract any dirt.

14.3 PREVENT THE TRANSMISSION OF GERMS

Winter campers are more likely to become sick from improper hand sanitation than from contracting Giardia from untreated water. Up to 40 per cent of stomach issues are directly related to not washing one's hands before preparing meals. Most germs are transmitted by hand to face contact, especially the mouth and eyes. Prevent the transmission of germs by taking actions to prevent or reduce intestinal illness. Especially keep your hands clean and keep your hands out of your mouth and away from your eyes.

Don't touch shared food. Pour snacks and trail mix into your hand as opposed to reaching in a bag to grab a handful. Or better yet pack your trail mix in a plastic bottle and pour it into your mouth without touching it. Use food utensils when portioning out dinner rations.

14.4 WINTER CAMPING POO: PACK IT OUT

What to do, with your winter poo? Eventually the snow will melt and in spring, the poo, once hidden from view, becomes exposed and soon contaminates nearby waterways – and that's taboo. In winter, it's best to pack it out, otherwise, you're leaving behind frozen waste for the next visitors.

Since it is winter your poo will freeze, so you won't have to worry about odor. Because waste is frozen in the winter, packing it out is not as distasteful as you may think. If you are caught short, a snowball makes good substitute for or supplement to toilet paper. Bury the snowball.

Many popular, high-use areas require you to pack out your waste. And some hikers pack out their poo even when they don't have to, in the interest of trying to make as little impact on the environment as possible.

As for peeing, pee away from water sources, trails and campsites and cover any spots of yellow snow.

Having the proper supplies — mainly a reliable, sanitary receptacle and hand sanitizer— is essential. You have several options, from fancy store-bought bags to homemade, rudimentary containers.



PACK OUT YOUR WASTE IN THE WINTER – ALL OF IT.

14.4.1 WAG BAG

WAG (Waste Alleviation and Gelling) Bag has become the overall term for any pack-it-out bag system. Wag Bags contain an inner bag and an outer for storage. It generally involves one bag with which you glove your hand and grab your business and another sturdier, sealable bag in which you deposit and seal the dump.

Cleanwaste the company that coined the actual term “WAG Bag,” has renamed their product the GO Anywhere waste kit. It includes a biodegradable waste pickup bag loaded with Poo Powder, a “transport bag,” toilet paper and hand sanitizer. The Poo Powder works by gelling more liquid waste, breaking down solids and controlling odor. ReStop and Biffy Bags are other manufacturers of waste bag kits, powders, and supplies.

14.4.1.1HOMEMADE WAG BAG

You easily can create your own Wag Bag using an interior/pickup bag, pre-packed with kitty litter if you wish, which functions similar to Poo Powder, and a larger, sturdy outer bag — think freezer-weight Ziploc. Heavy-duty trash compactor bags work as a Wag Bag trash bag. If bags don't seem sturdy enough, some people use a coffee can as their outer container. Tupperware with a snug-fitting lid that you're certain you no longer need in the kitchen would work, too.



Rangers at Mt. Shasta offer a user-friendly homemade kit to hikers which includes an 11 x 17 sheet of paper with a bull's-eye printed on it for pickup. Just place the bull's-eye on your poo pile and you'll have plenty of paper to wrap around it, avoiding all hand contact. The kit also includes a one-gallon Ziploc bag and a sack with kitty litter. There are disposal receptacles at the trail head, and hikers can pick up kits there or at area outdoor shops.

A cheap alternative is using colored re-closable bag (e.g. Ziploc) for just solid wastes. These bags can be purchased by the carton from a shipping supply company such as Uline. These can contain your waste (or feminine hygiene products) out of sight. Hey its winter and your poo will freeze so you won't have to worry about odor.

Users who make their own Wag Bags should note that homemade versions can't be tossed into landfills, as can EPA-approved commercial ones, like GO Anywhere, Biffy Bags, and ReStop.

14.4.1.2“WAGGING” TIPS

Best practices for using a wag bag come with, well, practice. Generally, when nature calls, you grab your bag kit, toilet paper, bag for used toilet paper, and hand sanitizer and head off to find a secluded area where people are unlikely to view your bare bottom. Squat and do your business.

You then take your trusty wag kit, slip the inner bag over your hand and grab your poo pile. Be careful not to spill the poo powder or kitty litter inside (so picking up your pile with the top part of the bag is best).

Then, fully enclose the poo and make sure the powder or litter has covered it. Powders, like Poo Powder above, or kitty litter are used to solidify waste and control odors. Then, seal that bag inside the thicker, outer bag or stash inside your container of choice. Place your used toilet paper in the bag. Clean your hands with hand sanitizer. Wag complete.

14.4.1.3 POOP TUBE

A poop tube is often a climber's preference, but winter campers can certainly use one, too. Use a length of PVC pipe (around 4 inches in diameter), a cap for one end, and a threaded fitting and plug for the other. (For cleaning, it's helpful to be able to remove both ends.) What length you cut is dependent on the length of your trip and, frankly, how much you poop. Six to 10 inches is standard, though 12 to 25 inches is recommended for longer trips. Either secure it to your pack with pack straps, or use duct tape and cord to make a handle and clip it to your pack for easy access. Pack standard coffee filters, place those on the ground, and aim. Or poop into brown paper bags. Then wrap up the business, send it down the tube, and seal it up.

14.4.2 DISPOSAL

Whether you pack it out in a bag, a tube, or plastic container waste should be properly disposed of after your trip, often that means into a toilet. Some of the commercially available bags are EPA-approved for landfills, but check rules first.

14.4.2.1 PACK-OUT MUSTS

Some waste items you always pack out, no matter where you are, what the season is or how small an item it is. Those items include tampons, pads, feminine hygiene products and diapers.