

Pet Waste and Water Quality:

It's Not Just on the Lawn, It's in Your Water



What is the problem?

Scooping your pooch's poop isn't just a courtesy for those walking behind you; it is also the healthy and environmentally sound thing to do. Pet waste can be a significant source of water pollution. When pet waste is not properly disposed, it can be carried by rain or snow runoff directly into nearby waterbodies or into storm drains. Storm drains in streets and neighborhoods usually flow directly to a stream, river, or estuary without any treatment. Untreated animal fecal matter and wastes can become a source of harmful bacteria and nutrients in water. Just as we don't want human sewage in our water, it is important to prevent pet waste from being carried into our waterways because of negligence.

What you can do:

You can follow these easy steps to be part of the solution to pet waste contamination.

1. The first step is to **always carry a plastic bag** with you when you walk your dog. Re-using an old newspaper delivery bag or plastic grocery bag works well.
2. Using the bag like a glove, you can then pick up the pet waste, turn the bag inside out around the waste, seal the bag, and **dispose of it in a trash can**. You can also flush un-bagged pet waste down the toilet.
3. **Don't place the bagged or un-bagged pet waste in a storm drain** or hose the pet waste towards storm drains as they drain directly to a stream, river, lake or other waterbody.
4. If you have a large yard, you may **bury un-bagged pet waste** in the yard at least 5 inches in the ground and away from vegetable gardens and waterways.

Are you risking your health?

People are at risk of getting sick from drinking or swimming in water contaminated by pet waste. Dogs can be significant hosts of disease causing organisms, including Giardia and Salmonella, which are protozoan and bacterial infections transmitted to humans by animals. Some swimming beaches and shellfish beds in New Hampshire are commonly shut down due to bacteria contamination.

The latest research

The environmental impact of dog waste has gone unrecognized for decades. Scientists recently developed a new lab technique of fingerprinting DNA to match bacteria found in the water to the bacteria from specific animals, including humans and domestic animals. Using this type of forensic science, New Hampshire scientists have found that dogs are a significant contributor of bacteria in several New Hampshire surface waters.

Other neighborhood water pollutants

Dog waste is only one of many pollutants from our neighborhoods that add to water pollution. Lawn fertilizers, motor oil, driveway sand and salt, and soapy water from washing cars in driveways commonly end up in streams and lakes.

Tell friends and neighbors about the affect of animal waste on the environment and our health. Encourage them to clean up after their pets and to dispose of the pet waste properly.