

Fido Can Pollute Our Waters

The Connection Between Pet Waste and Water Quality

Pet owners know the joys dogs and cats can bring to their lives. But they should also be aware of the important responsibility that owning a pet brings to our daily routines. One of the key responsibilities of pet ownership is cleaning up after our pets. We all probably have had the experience of walking through a park and encountering pet waste. Pet waste on the ground is not only unsightly but also can contaminate our waters. If not cleaned up and disposed of properly, the bacteria in pet waste gets washed into the streets, down storm drains, and into the creeks, streams, and eventually our Three Rivers. When animal waste enters a natural creek, it uses the available dissolved oxygen to create ammonia. The combination of low oxygen, ammonia and warm temperatures is detrimental to fish and other aquatic life. Animal waste contains nutrients that promote excessive weed and algae growth. Nutrients can make water cloudy and green, which further inhibits aquatic life and decreases the available dissolved oxygen.

Pet Care Guidelines

1. **Watch what you feed your pet.** The reality is that what goes in must come out. The type of food you give your pet will affect the quality and quantity of pet waste you must deal with. The easier food is to digest, the more completely it will be digested, resulting in smaller stools that will decompose more quickly. Rice-based food is the most easily digested. Soy and wheat-based foods aren't bad, but corn based food doesn't break down well at all. Canned foods often contain red dye, which cannot be digested and will pass right through an animal's system. If a food isn't easily digested, the resulting stool will not break down easily, so read labels carefully. Consult your vet if you have questions about the nutritional value of a particular brand of pet food.

2. **Control where your pet relieves himself.** This isn't just a good idea in terms of water quality. It's also a law in most municipalities. Many people believe that an animal won't soil its own territory and their pets won't use the back yard. This really isn't true. You can make your yard more appealing to your pet by tilling a small section of the ground, thus reserving that spot solely for your pet's needs. Provide a buffer zone and/or a fence to prevent animals from urinating or defecating into a creek, stream, or other stormwater drainage feature. Do not keep pets immediately adjacent to ditches, swales, storm drains, pipes or culverts. Walk dogs in vegetated areas away from streams, creeks, ditches, and drainage channels.

3. Proper Clean Up Tips

A. Clean up yards or fields that contain pet wastes on a regular basis. Animal waste and cat litter can be sent to the sanitary landfill as part of the regular weekly garbage pickup. Burying animal waste and cat litter in the ground is also an acceptable option, away from ditches or stormwater channels. Dumping used cat litter in piles on the ground surface is not an environmentally approved practice.

Not Cleaning Up After Your Pet Properly is No Laughing Matter When it Comes to the Environment.



B. If you are on a sewer system, you can dispose of the fecal matter collected when walking your dog, emptying your cat's litter pan, or cleaning up your yard by flushing waste down the toilet. This ensures that it stays out of storm drains and is treated. Be sure to separate solid waste from cat litter when cleaning the cat box. Don't flush cat litter down the toilet!

C. Add small quantities of pet waste to a compost pile. Mix well. Make sure that pet waste is completely decomposed before using compost for gardens.

D. One of the best solutions for keeping waste out of storm drains is to install a pet septic system. Some of them connect to your home sewer or septic system in your yard. Others use enzymes to break down stools, allowing them to leach into the ground. If your local pet store doesn't carry one of these products, the store should be able to tell you how to order it from a pet-products catalog.

E. To avoid kitty litters, you might consider a toilet training kit for your cat, available at most pet stores. There are many books and websites devoted to the subject and do-it-yourself kits.

4. **Washing Your Pets.** If possible, bathe your pets indoors using less-toxic shampoos or have your pet professionally groomed. Follow instructions on the products and clean up spills. If you must bathe your pet outside, wash it on your lawn or another absorbent/permeable surface to keep the washwater from running into the street or storm drain. Even biodegradable soaps and shampoos can be harmful to marine life and the environment.

Source Information for this Article Provided by the County of Santa Barbara, Thurston County, Washington, Knoxville Best Management Practices Manual, and the City of Carson, California.