

Protect Our Rivers and Streams-Pick Up Pet Waste!

You may be wondering how the pet waste from your little “Fluffy,” can possibly affect water quality. The answer is that it doesn’t matter if your pet is large or small, all pet waste contributes to water pollution if it is not cleaned up.

When it rains, pet waste that has been left on lawns, trails, sidewalks or streets, ends up in runoff flowing over these impervious surfaces, and washes into storm drains. The waste, along with the bacteria and other pollutants that it carries, flows with the untreated storm water directly into ditches, streams, ponds, lakes and rivers. Once it enters a water body, the animal waste starts to decompose, using the dissolved oxygen in the water. When that happens, the oxygen supply that the fish and other aquatic organisms need to live is depleted and they cannot survive. The nutrients, including nitrogen, contained in pet waste act like fertilizer in the water and contribute to exaggerated algae growth, creating algae blooms. When the algae blooms decompose, their decomposers use up even more oxygen. Pet waste contains harmful organisms such as Giardia, Salmonella and E. coli, which contribute to the high bacteria levels that make rivers unsafe for swimming and fishing. These bacteria cause intestinal diseases with stomach cramps and diarrhea and are easily transmitted to humans and other animals, through contaminated water, soil, and food. One small dog produces about .75 pounds of waste in one day and that much waste contains 7.825 billion bacteria. According to a recent estimate, there are approximately 145,000 dogs living in Summit County, so you can see the tremendous impact that pet waste can have on water quality if it is not picked up.

Another problem is that when pet waste is not disposed of properly, not only water quality, but also your health may be at risk too. Pet waste is not only smelly and unsightly but it can make people and other animals sick. Adults working in their gardens, children playing outside, family pets, and wildlife are all in danger of being infected from the bacteria and parasites found in pet waste.

We can all help to solve this pet waste problem by following these simple guidelines:

- ❖ Try to clean up pet waste in your yard daily. If you can’t clean up on a regular basis, at least pick it up when there is rain in the forecast.
- ❖ Consider buying a handy pooper-scooper to make the pick-up easier.
- ❖ Pick up waste when walking your dog. Carry bags with you or tie one or two onto your dog’s leash. (The best bags to use are biodegradable bags which can be purchased at pet stores.) Bag the waste and put it in the trash, either in a public receptacle or in your own trash when you get home. Make sure the bag is tied shut to seal it.

- ❖ Contact your local parks department and encourage them to provide pet waste stations including signage in area parks, along trails and in public places where people frequently walk their dogs.
- ❖ Bury pet waste in your yard, about 12 inches deep, and cover it with at least eight inches of soil to let it decompose slowly. Bury the waste in several different locations, and keep it away from vegetable gardens, wells, streams, ditches and septic systems.
- ❖ Install an underground pet waste disposal system, sometimes called a “Doggie Dooley.” This device acts like a mini-septic system, using enzymes to break down the waste into a liquid form which is then absorbed into the soil underground. You just lift the cover and put the waste directly into the “Dooley.” No bags are necessary. You can view examples of these containers on-line.
- ❖ Consider hiring a pet-waste pick-up service to clean up your yard. They will do the “dirty work” for you and your pet waste will be disposed of properly. A quick Web search will give you information on local companies that provide this service.
- ❖ Pet waste should not be added to your home compost pile because the compost doesn’t generate enough heat to kill the pathogens in the pet waste. These pathogens could be picked up by you from hand contact with the soil or from eating the vegetables grown in that soil.
- ❖ Pet waste should never be left near a curb because it can wash directly into a nearby storm drain when it rains.

The problem of pet waste accumulation in suburban areas is very real, due to the damaging effects it has on water quality and overall health. There are people who feel that it is useless to clean up pet waste because the wildlife will leave waste anyway. But the difference is that the large concentration of dogs living in any one small geographic area produces many times the amount of waste of the wildlife population in that same area. Even if we subscribe to the notion, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind” the problem won’t go anywhere, except down the storm drain! So find a system that works for you and start “Scooping the Poop.” “It’s Your Doodie!” You can contact Summit Soil and Water Conservation District at (330) 929-2871, or go to <http://www.summitswcd.org>, for more information.