

# PET WASTE AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Pet waste isn't just a nuisance in yards and parks: it's full of bacteria that can make people and aquatic habitats sick. When left on the ground, precipitation and sprinkler runoff can wash pet waste (and the bacteria it carries) into storm drains. Since most storm sewers discharge into rivers, lakes, and streams without undergoing any treatment, runoff polluted with pet waste and other contaminants can impair our surface water resources.

With 80% of people (and therefore most of America's 90 million dogs) living in developed areas where stormwater isn't treated before discharging into our rivers, the impact of pet waste-contaminated runoff is amplified. It doesn't stay where it's left, as its bacteria can be swept up and concentrated downstream. Considering that dogs are relative newcomers to the ecosystem, the fact that they produce 10 million tons of waste each year in the U.S alone indicates a significant environmental impact.

When beaches are closed in the summer, it's often due to high levels of bacteria, especially *E. coli*. While failing septic tanks, wildlife, and poorly managed livestock can also introduce bacteria into the watershed, pet waste is a major contributor. In fact, due to the high protein, highly processed diets of modern dogs, their waste can contain more bacteria and pathogens by weight than that of cows. Just one gram of dog waste can contain as many as 23 million fecal coliform bacteria! It can also contain salmonella, giardia, and other bacteria and parasites that spread disease and impair water quality.



## Help Keep Our Waterways Healthy

There are many threats to the health of our watershed, but picking up after our pets is a simple and easy way to limit one source of pollution.



**Bring A Bag:** Carry a bag (preferably biodegradable) when walking pets and be sure to pick up after them. Clean up pet waste in your yard frequently.

**Clean It Up:** Pick up pet waste from your yard or hire a pet waste removal company to clean it on a routine basis. Pick it up before rain, watering your yard, or cleaning patios and driveways. Never hose pet waste into the street or gutter.

**Dispose of the Waste:** Throw it away with the household trash, flush it, or bury small quantities in your yard where it can decompose slowly. For the latter, dig a hole one foot deep. Put three to four inches of waste at the bottom of the hole. Cover the waste with at least eight inches of soil. You can bury the waste in several different locations in your yard, but keep it away from vegetable gardens!

In recent years, sources of pollution like industrial wastes from factories have been greatly reduced. Now more than 60 percent of water pollution comes from things like residential car washing, cars leaking oil, fertilizers from farms, lawns and gardens, pet waste, and failing septic tanks. All these sources add up to a big pollution problem, but each of us can do small things to help clean up our water, and that adds up to a pollution solution!