

The Problem with Pet Waste

We all love our pets and as responsible pet owners we need to properly dispose of pet waste whether it lands on the sidewalk, our neighbor's lawn, in the park, or in our yard. Pet waste is more than a smelly nuisance. It is a pollutant carried to our waterways by stormwater runoff. It is a source of pathogens and nutrients all of which degrade water quality. In fact, in urban areas, pet waste and fertilizers are among the top sources of nutrients to stormwater. Excess nutrients impair water quality, causing harmful and nuisance algal blooms (HNABs). Poor water quality in streams and rivers means higher water treatment costs and reduced recreational use.

A Cumulative Effect. Perhaps you are thinking that the small pile left on the lawn this morning couldn't cause that much harm. Consider this, according to survey data there are approximately 0.6 dogs for every US household (AVMA, 2018). So, for Kentucky this translates to over 1 million dogs. What does this mean in terms of pet waste? Using EPA's estimate that each dog produces 275 pounds of waste per year, this comes to ***over 100,000 tons of dog waste generated annually***. Results from surveys suggest that 40% of dog waste is left on the ground. When waste is not disposed of properly, it adds nutrients to our soils and waterways. So, if you don't pick up after your pet, you are just piling it on.

It matters. Every time you "doo" the right thing and pick up after your pet, you remove additional phosphorus (P) inputs into our soil and water system. In Kentucky this is important because our soils are naturally rich in P and any additions increase the risk that excess P will be mobilized and transported to our waterways. Phosphorus is a key element in the development of algal blooms, which are colonies of algae that have grown out of control. Large growths of algae negatively impact local economies, **disrupt stream ecosystems and may be harmful to wildlife, pets, and people.**

What you can do. One simple step is *Bag the Doo!*, no matter where it drops, plops, or lands. While many people will pick up pet waste in public areas, such as parks or in their neighborhoods, it is equally important to pick it up at home. No matter where you are, properly dispose of pet waste in a waste receptacle.

Remember, it's just 4 simple steps: Glove It, Grab It, Turn It, and Trash It!

SOCIAL MEDIA DESCRIPTION:

Pet waste left on the ground can be carried by stormwater runoff to our waterways, contributing to bacteria and nutrient pollution. Help us improve water quality in Kentucky streams by bagging the doo at home and on walks.

For Agent - References and Resources:

CAFÉ News: UK Specialists Stress Algae Bloom Prevention Starts in the Backyard

<https://news.ca.uky.edu/article/uk-specialists-stress-algae-bloom-prevention-starts-backyard>

ENRI Website: <https://water.ca.uky.edu/content/scoop-poop-pet-waste-issues>

AVMA, pet owner statistics: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/reports-statistics/us-pet-ownership-statistics>

HENV-203: Stormwater

HENV 402: Water Quality and Nutrient Management at Home