

Why should my community care about pet waste?



How is pet waste harmful?

Animal waste contains several types of pollutants that contribute to water quality problems: nutrients, pathogens and a naturally toxic material, ammonia. When animal waste ends up in a lake, stream, or bay, it decomposes, using up oxygen and releasing its pollutant load. During summer months when the water is warm, the combination of low oxygen levels and ammonia can kill fish and other aquatic organisms. The nutrients can also cause excessive growth of aquatic weeds and algae which use up oxygen supplies now unavailable for aquatic plants and animals. In addition, these conditions can make the water murky green and smelly which prevents the area from being usable for swimming, boating or

fishing. Pathogens, the disease-causing bacteria and viruses associated with animal waste, can also make water unsafe for human use. If pathogens or the bacteria associated with animal waste are found during water testing, shellfish beds may be closed to harvest, beaches may be closed to swimming and drinking water supplies may require expensive disinfection.

How does pet waste get into streams and rivers in the first place?

When pet waste is left to decay on the sidewalk or on grass, it reaches our waterways by stormwater. Stormwater is water from rain or melting snow that does not quickly soak into the ground. As it flows, this runoff collects and transports pet waste and other potential pollutants directly into our waterbodies through storm drains. Contrary to popular belief, storm drains do not carry stormwater to wastewater treatment plants. Storm drains and sewers are designed to move runoff from your neighborhood directly to the nearest body of water.

What can I do to help?

The most effective way for pet owners to limit their pet's contribution to water contamination is to simply clean up and dispose of pet waste. As long as the droppings are not mixed with other materials, pet waste should be flushed down the toilet. This allows waste to be properly treated by a community sewage plant or septic system. Also, pet waste can be sealed in a plastic bag and put into the garbage if local law allows it. Installing a pet waste station and educating the public on the importance of picking up after their pets are important first steps in addressing pet waste issues.



A picture of a Dogi-Pot