

Pet Waste—Get the Scoop

Bacteria—just the thought makes many of us squirm. We battle bacteria in our homes, but what about bacteria on our beaches and in our water? Back in 1990 the DNR did water quality studies in the Fox River Watershed and through these studies; they labeled the Fox River as well as its feeder streams as “unsafe” for human contact due to bacteria levels. Where do all the bacteria come from? Certainly overflows from sewage treatment plants add to bacteria levels. But how about another culprit—how about our pets?

Pet waste contains bacteria, parasites and nutrients—all of which damage our waterways. But could it really be that our pets help pollute our waters? Let’s look at the numbers. Waukesha County Humane Officers estimate there are 110,000 dogs in Waukesha County. Each dog produces an average of ½ pound of waste per day. That’s an average of 55,000 pounds of dog waste per day and a whopping 20 million pounds per year! Unfortunately, much of this waste is left lying around outside. As raindrops fall on the waste, particles wash away in the rainwater. This contaminated rainwater may contain bacteria, nutrients and parasites that run off into the storm drain reaching our local rivers and streams. Yuck!

So what can we do? First of all—pick it up! Pick up your pet waste and dispose of it properly. There are several methods of disposal that you can use. You may flush it down the toilet—sounds gross, but it will be treated and cleaned like any other waste. You can bury it at least 6 inches deep where it cannot possibly affect our water. You can purchase a pet waste composter at any pet store and it will act like a miniature septic system for your dog to handle the waste. Any of these options will effectively remove the waste from the environment and keep contamination risks to a minimum. Putting the pet waste in the garbage is an option, but not necessarily the best one. This shifts the problem to the landfill, where it could potentially contaminate the groundwater.

What should we not do? Do not compost the dog waste if you will be using the compost on a vegetable garden or any other edible plants. The composting process is not hot enough to safely kill all the parasites and bacteria. But most important—do not leave it lay on the ground.

Be a responsible pet owner and do the right thing for keeping our rivers and streams clean!