

Pet Waste and Water Quality

Did you know that pet waste, which hasn't been disposed of properly, can be an unnatural pollutant?

Because we have so much impervious surface (these are surfaces like driveways, streets and parking lots that do not allow water to infiltrate the soil), pet waste left on the grass, sidewalk or street is automatically "washed" into our storm drainage system when there are heavy rains.

Our drainage systems flow through various watersheds, creeks, and culverts before reaching the Bay. And, the liquids that flow through these drainage systems have not been processed by our wastewater treatment plant.

When pet waste is washed into bodies of water, it decays, uses up oxygen and sometimes releases ammonia. These resultants, when combined with warm temperatures, can kill fish.

Additionally, pet waste also contains nutrients that encourage weed and algae growth – both in your yard and the storm drainage system. Overly "fertile" water may become cloudy and green making it unattractive for swimming, boating and fishing.

A single gram of dog feces contains 23 million fecal coliform bacteria. More often than not, the bacteria does not survive once expelled. However, if certain factors all come into play (higher water temperature, nutrients and sediment), the combination of the bacteria and pathogenic organisms not only contribute to greater pollution, but may also cause illness to those who come in contact with the water. Symptoms include gastrointestinal illness, dehydration, headaches, rash, fever and more.

What can you do? First, make sure that you're not including pet waste in your garden soil or composter. Secondly, ALWAYS pick up your pet's waste and either place in a securely closed bag and deposit it in the trash OR simply flush it down the toilet. However, be sure to remove all cat litter, sticks and rocks when using the flushing method.