



RRWA Environmental Column – February 2007
Pick Up After Your Pet

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Is there anything worse than taking a walk along the creek path and stepping in a present left by Laddie the Labrador? How about pet waste from everyone's Fido or Fluffy dirtying up the waterways, killing aquatic life, or transmitting disease to kids and other pets?

Everyone needs to pick up after their pets. Cleaning up your pet's waste helps keep our pets, the environment and each other healthy.

Pet waste in public areas is unsightly, unsanitary and unsafe. Even pet waste left out in private yards poses hazards to people, animals and the environment.

Pet waste contains organisms that can cause diseases such as giardiasis, hookworm, salmonellosis, toxocariasis, and tapeworm from dog waste, and toxoplasmosis from cat waste. Flies, insects, or balls and toys that come into contact with the waste can carry the organisms to new hosts – other pets and people. Children, pregnant women, and people with depressed immune systems are particularly susceptible to certain diseases that can be transmitted through contact with pet waste.

Pet waste left out in parks, yards and streets also gets washed down storm drains that flow directly into our local waterways-- without being treated at sewer treatment facilities. Pet waste has nutrients that promote excess algae growth, making the water cloudy and green. Waste decaying in the creeks depletes oxygen and releases ammonia. Combined with warm temperatures, this kills aquatic life.

What can you do? The entire community benefits when pet waste is picked up and disposed of properly.

- Pick up pet waste from your yard. It is not a fertilizer.
- Dispose of your pet's waste in the trash. Place dog waste or cat litter in a carefully tied bag to avoid spillage during trash collection. Pet waste should not be placed in curbside yard waste recycling bins.
- Bury pet waste in your yard, at least 12 inches deep and cover with at least eight inches of soil to let it decompose slowly. Bury the waste in several different locations and keep it away from vegetable gardens.
- Don't flush cat feces or used cat litter down the toilet, place it in the trash instead. The toxoplasmosis parasite that is sometimes present in cat feces kills sea otters along California's coasts. That parasite isn't necessarily destroyed at sewage treatment plants. It is generally acceptable to flush other pet wastes down the toilet but objects such as plastic bags, puppy "pee pads", newspaper and other materials should never be flushed down the toilet since such things could easily clog the toilet or sewer pipes.



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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- Keep your cat on your property so that you can responsibly clean up its waste. The neighborhood shouldn't be your cat's litter box!
- Carry disposable bags while walking your dog to pick up and dispose of waste properly. Though some parks may provide bags, consider using the plastic bags that accumulate around your house, such the bags from your morning newspaper or wrappers from food products such as bread.

It's the neighborly thing to do, and the right thing to do – for your pets, for other people, and for the environment. Thank you for picking up after your pets!

The Russian River Watershed Association (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of eleven cities, counties and special districts in the watershed that are working together on programs for clean water, fisheries restoration and watershed enhancement.