



# Russian River Watershed Association

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## RRWA Environmental Column – January 2014

### Pick Up After Your Pet

There are 78 million dogs in the U.S. today. They eat and then each eliminates almost a pound of poop every day. The resulting 3.6 billion pounds of dog poop produced in a year can fill 800 football fields, one foot deep! This is no small nuisance. Sonoma County's forty-three thousand dogs produce over thirty-two thousand pounds daily. 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 in your yard is hazardous to people, animals and the environment. Pets, children who play outside, and adults who garden are most at risk for infection from some of the bacteria and parasites found in pet waste. Diseases or parasites that can be transmitted from pet waste to humans include:

***Campylobacteriosis*** – A bacterial infection carried by dogs and cats that frequently causes diarrhea in humans.

***Cryptosporidium*** – A protozoan parasite carried by dogs, cats, mice, calves and many other mammals. Common symptoms include diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea and dehydration. May be fatal to people with depressed immune systems.

***Toxocariasis*** – Roundworms usually transmitted from dogs to humans, often without noticeable symptoms, but may cause vision loss, a rash, fever, or cough.

Hookworms, fecal coliform bacteria, *Giardiasis*, *Salmonella*, *Brucellosis*, *Yersinia enterocolitica*, and *Leptospirosis* are other examples of bacteria or parasites that are associated with pet waste. These inflict a wide variety of symptoms and can survive in the soil from several days to months or as long as 4 plus years for the roundworm *Toxocariasis*. Flies, insects, or balls and toys that come into contact with the waste can spread the organisms to new hosts – other pets and people.

Pet waste can be washed by rainfall into storm drains and nearby creeks and rivers. Storm drains do not connect to treatment facilities, so untreated animal feces end up in creeks and rivers, causing significant water pollution. Decaying pet waste consumes oxygen and sometimes releases ammonia. Low oxygen levels and ammonia can damage the health of fish and other aquatic life. Pet waste also contains nutrients that promote weed and algae growth. The resulting cloudy and green water makes swimming and recreation unappealing or even unhealthy.

#### **Common Misconceptions:**

No need to pick it up. It will eventually just go away.

Even though the solids may dissolve, pathogens and other contaminants can be washed into the nearest storm drain or waterway. The pathogens will stay for months to years and can make you and your children sick



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It's more natural to leave it there. Wild animals have been here for years.

No watershed is naturally prepared to accommodate the amount of waste produced by domesticated dogs. For example the number of wolves which would naturally inhabit an area the size of Clark County, Washington would be around 70 - compare that to the 110,000 dogs living there now!

## I can bury it or put it in my compost bin

Under no circumstances should you put pet waste in your compost or bury it where food will be grown. Never place pet waste in your yard waste bin. Details on composting for ornamental plants are provided below.

### **What can we do with Doggie Doo?**

- Pick up pet waste from your yard and put it in the trash. Place dog waste in a carefully tied bag to avoid spillage during trash collection. Carry disposable bags while walking your dog to pick up the waste.
- Flush it down the toilet if trash is not available. To avoid plumbing problems, never use a so-called "flushable bag" and don't flush any yard debris with it.
- Bury pet waste in your yard, at least 6-10 inches deep in areas away from where food is grown. Cover it with soil to let it decompose slowly. Bury the waste in several different locations. This may not be practical in small yards.
- Another option is composting which removes waste without disposing of it as trash keeping the poop out of the landfill. Composting dog waste turns something that is potentially dangerous to public health and water quality into a useful soil enrichment that can be used on ornamental plants. However, due to odor and health issues, composting dog waste must be managed at a high enough temperature. Using this process takes careful consideration.

There are two ways that dog waste can be composted, and the product can only be used on non-edible ornamental plants. The better method is above ground in a typical household plastic compost bin mixing sawdust with the poop. The second more difficult option is an underground septic tank style composter. This style of composter uses bacteria to break down the waste. There are commercial options available, but there are also inexpensive do-it-yourself options. It is important to keep in mind that underground options are not suited for soils that drain too quickly or too slowly.

Additional information on this subject:

<http://www.the-compost-gardener.com/composting-pet-waste.html#axzz246Ram089>

Instructions on how to check your soil's drainage:

<http://www.the-compost-gardener.com/doggie-dooley.html>



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Examples of composters you can purchase:

[http://www.thedogdaily.com/happy/seasonal\\_happy/recycle\\_dog\\_waste/index.html#axzz246NPEMCa](http://www.thedogdaily.com/happy/seasonal_happy/recycle_dog_waste/index.html#axzz246NPEMCa)

Pick up after your pets - it's the neighborly thing to do, and the right thing to do – for your pets, for other people, and for the environment.

*This article was authored by Forest Frasier of the City of Santa Rosa, on behalf of RRWA. RRWA ([www.rrwatershed.org](http://www.rrwatershed.org)) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.*