



## PET WASTE FAQs

### GENERAL

**1 Q: Why should I pick it up (even if it's on my own property)?**

**A:** The pathogens in pet waste are harmful to the health of humans, animals, and the environment.

**PUBLIC PROPERTY:** Local animal control ordinances declare it is unlawful to leave pet waste on public property and require its immediate removal.

**PRIVATE PROPERTY:** Local water quality and health ordinances also apply to private property and could result in enforcement, including fines, if it can be determined that pet waste, or its pathogens, on your property are being washed into storm drains or waterways, or if the accumulation of waste is a nuisance or menace to health.

### DISPOSAL

**2 Q: How should I dispose of pet waste?**

**A:** Scoop the poop, bag it, and put it in the trash (garbage).

**3 Q: Can I put pet waste in the trash (garbage)?**

**A:** Yes, this is the preferred disposal method. By putting pet waste in the trash, it prevents the waste from becoming a source of pollution in our streams and bays. Landfills are designed to safely handle substances such as dog waste, cat litter, and dirty diapers.

Many people already place their dog waste in the trash because it's convenient. Some hide it in the trashcan because they think it's prohibited. Don't worry! It's allowed. If you are already placing it in the trash, keep up the good work!

**4 Q: Can I bury or compost pet waste?**

**A:** Composting and burial do not kill hazardous pathogens that may be in the waste and can pollute water. Landfills are designed to safely handle substances such as dog waste, cat litter, and dirty diapers. Yards are not.

Most home compost piles don't reach temperatures sufficient to kill many hazardous pathogens. Extended exposure at 140-degree temperatures is required to kill E. coli and Salmonella.

Giardia can survive temperature extremes, chlorination, and drying. Cryptosporidium, Leptospira, Salmonella, and E. coli can survive for months in feces or soil. Roundworms can survive for four years in soil.

Even commercial yard waste processors do not currently compost waste at temperatures sufficient to kill many pathogens in pet waste, so *don't* put dog waste in the yard waste bins for curbside pickup.



## **5** Q: Can I flush pet waste down the toilet?

**A:** **MAYBE.** If you are on a municipal sewer system AND your sewer purveyor approves AND you can stand the yuck-factor, flushing can be a desirable method of disposal. Most people, especially those with large or multiple dogs, are not comfortable with the notion of bringing outdoor pet waste indoors to flush it. If you can handle it, go wild!

If you have a septic system, then do NOT flush pet waste down the toilet. Flushing pet waste can potentially exceed the design capacity of the septic system. High volumes of hair and ash, not normally found in human waste, can interfere with septic system functions and clog drain fields.

### **DON'T flush cat waste if it has litter stuck to it.**

Another alternative is to install a pet waste flushing system at your outdoor sanitary sewer cleanout if you are connected to a public sewer system (NOT a septic system). Although we don't endorse these products, two examples may be found at:

<http://www.doggiedoodrain.com/xcart//home.php>

<http://www.powerloo.com/>

## **6** Q: How about pet waste digesters and doggie septic systems?

**A:** Not a good idea. Commercially produced pet waste digesters are no better than burial, since they essentially function like broken septic systems. There is evidence that these systems often do not function properly. Even manufacturers say that they do not function properly where water tables are high, in low temperatures, and in some soil types common to our area. Manufacturers also say that the systems don't work as well when used with dog foods containing high ash levels, which are common in many low-cost dog foods. Even assuming these devices function as designed, there is little, if any, evidence that they treat waste sufficiently to meet desired standards. Remember, pet waste is sewage just like human waste; using such a device to treat an equivalent amount of human waste is prohibited by law.

The devices are an added expense to the homeowner (typically \$25-\$60 for the device and \$14 annually for "digester"), require installation, and require frequent maintenance (some recommend daily addition of water and "digester" every few days). Our advice: bag it and place it in the trash. It's cheaper, easier, and safer.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL**

## **7** Q: Isn't pet waste "biodegradable" or "natural"?

**A:** Pet waste is biodegradable in that it decomposes under natural conditions, but the harmful bacteria, viruses, and parasites in it can continue to live on even though the waste pile seems to have disappeared. When pet waste is washed into streams or bays, the waste decomposes, using up the oxygen in the water and releasing ammonia. Under those conditions and warm water temperatures, fish and other aquatic life can be killed. Pet waste also contains nutrients that encourage weed and algae growth.

## **8** Q: Why can't I use it as fertilizer?

**A:** Pet waste contains bacteria, viruses, and parasites that are harmful to the health of humans, animals, and the environment. Some of these pathogens can live in the soil for four years.



**9 Q: Isn't landfilling bad? Shouldn't we do things more naturally?**

**A:** We certainly want to reduce our waste stream to landfills wherever possible. When it comes to pet waste, however, there is currently no better alternative. There is nothing "natural" about the concentrated number of dogs in Kitsap County's urban and suburban areas. Native wildlife populations do not reach that density. The question, then, is how we deal with the waste produced by this unnatural concentration of animals.

Burial, composting, waste digesters, and letting it lay in yards contaminate water and jeopardizes human and pet health. Flushing is impractical for most people. At some point in the future, commercial composting technology may be sufficient to treat pet waste, enabling curbside pickup along with yard waste. Until then, landfilling is the best alternative for pet waste. Composting is good for yard waste and bad for pet waste.

**10 Q: The stormwater in my neighborhood goes to a pond and swale. Isn't it treated there?**

**A:** No. Dog waste is raw sewage. Stormwater ponds and swales are not designed to treat the pathogens in raw sewage. Stormwater is not treated at a sewage treatment plant. The stormwater from ponds is released into pipes and ditches that discharge directly to streams and bays.

Ponds and swales do help clean stormwater by providing an opportunity for sediments, and any pollutants that are bound to them, to settle out; however, pathogens that remain suspended are discharged directly into streams and bays without further treatment.

**REGULATORY**

**11 Q: Where can I find the regulation(s)?**

**A:** (1) Kitsap County Board of Health Ordinance 2010-1, Solid Waste Regulations, Section 305.

<http://www.kitsapcountyhealth.com/environment/regulations.php>

(2) City of Poulsbo Municipal Code, Section 6.02.130 and Section 13.18

[www.cityofpoulsbo.com](http://www.cityofpoulsbo.com)

**HEALTH**

**12 Q: How can pet waste harm humans?**

**A:** Pet waste contains many harmful pathogens which can affect humans, causing mild distress to serious diseases. The following table lists some of the organisms and their harmful effects.



## Hazardous Organisms Found in Dog Waste

Organism	Common Name	Survival / Human Disease
<i>Toxocaracanis</i>	Roundworms	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ 4 years in soil.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> VLM (visceral larva migrans) or toxocariasis, an infection caused by certain parasites, leading to enlargement of the liver (hepatomegaly), inflammation of the middle muscular layer of the heart wall (myocarditis), inflammation of the kidneys (nephritis), inflammation of the lungs (pneumonitis), and blindness. Usually in children, but can occur in adults.</p>
<i>Baylisascaris procyonis</i> (g. <i>Toxocara</i> )	Roundworms	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ Eggs can survive in moist soil for years.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Severe neurological form of VLM (visceral larva migrans, see above), especially in young children.</p>
<i>Ancylostoma spp.</i>	Hookworms	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ 3 to 4 weeks. ■ No known effective chemical or pesticide.</p> <p>■ Prompt removal of dog and cat feces greatly reduces risk of infection.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Spreading lesions and severe itching (pruritis). In rare instances can cause symptoms like VLM (see above). Puppies are a significant source of infection.</p>
<i>Cryptosporidium parvum</i>	none	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ At least 6 months. ■ Susceptible to drying.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Self-limiting inflammation of the lining membrane of the stomach and the intestines (gastroenteritis), protracted in susceptible individuals. CDC reports 300,000 cases annually, 90% of waterborne origin.</p>
<i>Campylobacter spp.</i>	none	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ Rapidly killed by heat, drying, and freezing.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Mild to severe, bloody diarrhea.</p>
<i>Escherichia coli</i>	<i>E. coli</i> , Fecal coliform bacteria	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ Up to 4 months in ruminant (cattle) feces.</p> <p>■ Extended exposure (i.e., 3 days) at 140°F required to kill organism.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Bloody diarrhea, severe cramps, blood clots in the kidney (hemolytic uremic syndrome or HUS), leading to kidney failure.</p>
<i>Giardia duodenalis</i>  <i>lamblia</i> ( <i>Giardia intestinalis</i> )	<i>Giardia</i> , Giardiasis	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ Resistant to drying, chlorination, and temperature extremes.</p> <p>■ Can survive for months in water.</p> <p>■ Relatively persistent during wastewater treatment.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Diarrhea, cramps, gas (flatulence), nausea, an excess of fat in stools (steatorrhea). Can be protracted and debilitating. CDC estimates 2 million cases in U.S., 90% of waterborne origin.</p>
<i>Salmonella spp.</i>	none	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ Up to 6 months in cattle feces.</p> <p>■ Extended exposure at 140°F required to kill organism.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Usually, mild inflammation of the lining membrane of the stomach and the intestines (gastroenteritis) within 6-48 hours.</p>
<i>Brucella spp.</i>	Brucellosis	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ 2½ months in moist soil ■ Rapidly killed by direct sunlight exposure.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Weakness, extreme exhaustion on slight effort, night sweats, chills, remittent fever, and generalized aches and pains appear in days to months. Can be protracted and extremely debilitating. Uncommon in U.S.</p>
<i>Yersinia enterocolitica</i>	none	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ Unknown.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Mild inflammation of the lining membrane of the stomach and the intestines (gastroenteritis).</p>
<i>Leptospira interrogans</i>	Leptospirosis	<p><b>Survival:</b> ■ Weeks to months in soil or water.</p> <p><b>Human Disease:</b> Usually mild fever but complications can be serious, including inflammation of the liver (hepatitis), interference with normal production and discharge of bile (jaundice), inflammation of the membranes that envelop the brain and spinal cord (meningitis), and kidney failure. Life threatening, but uncommon. There has been a recent increase in the numbers of dogs with leptospire.</p>

### FAQ Sources

1. City of Federal Way brochure, "Doo the Right Thing"
2. Snohomish County
3. City of Poulsbo