

Pet Waste and Worcester's Stormwater Quality*

Worcester's many beautiful waterways support diverse recreational activities. Unfortunately, swimming, boating, and fishing in these waters can be adversely impacted by improper disposal of pet waste. Pet waste that is dumped into a catch basin or left on the sidewalk will eventually reach one of Worcester's lakes or streams. Most catch basins in Worcester drain directly into local streams and lakes, carrying many pollutants along with the stormwater.

This is the why it's so important to clean up after your pet. It can be as easy as taking a plastic bag or pooper-scooper along on your next walk. Take the waste home and toss it in the yellow City of Worcester bag with your household trash.



When pet waste is washed into lakes or streams the waste decays, using up oxygen and sometimes releasing ammonia. Low oxygen levels and ammonia combined with warm temperatures can kill fish.

Pet waste also contains nutrients that encourage weed and algae growth. Overly fertile water becomes cloudy, green and unattractive for swimming, boating and fishing.

Perhaps most importantly, pet waste carries diseases, which make water unsafe for recreational uses.

Are you risking your health?

When pet waste is disposed of improperly, not only water quality suffers – your health may be at risk, too. Pets, children who play outside, and adults who garden are most at risk for infection from some bacteria and parasites found in pet waste. Flies may also spread diseases from animal 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 intestinal illness in humans.

Cryptosporidium – A protozoan parasite carried by dogs, cats, mice, and many other mammals. Common symptoms include intestinal illness, 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.

Toxoplasmosis – A protozoan parasite carried by cats that can cause birth defects such as mental retardation and blindness if a woman becomes infected during pregnancy; also a problem for people with depressed immune systems. Symptoms include headache, muscle aches, and lymph node enlargement.

Pet waste is one of many sources of pollution to our lakes and streams. Fortunately, this waste can easily be kept out of Worcester's waterways.

You can make a difference.

Cleaning up after your pet is just one step you can take to significantly improve Worcester's lake and stream water quality. If you have questions about stormwater-related pollution, or about how you can get involved in improving the quality of our lakes and streams, please call DPW&P Customer Service at 508-929-1300, Monday through Friday, 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM.

*Adapted from "Pet Waste and Water Quality," University of Wisconsin, Extension, 1993.



If you have questions, comments or suggestions related to the content of
On The Water Front, please call
508-799-1484 or write to: DPW Water Operations, 18 East Worcester Street, Worcester, MA 01604.
ATTN: On The Water Front