



The Urban Corner by Eric Schuh

Stormwater Education Tip of the Day

The Scoop on Poop!

Are you like many Snohomish County residents who keep animals as pets like a dog or a cat? Do you clean up after your pet? If you do, do you dump the waste in the street or storm sewer? Do you leave it to decay on the sidewalk or on the grass near your street? If so, you could be causing pollution or contributing to health problems in your local watershed!

When it rains, stormwater flows from rooftops, over paved areas, over and into bare soil, and through sloped lawns. As it flows, this runoff can collect and transport potential pollutants, including pet waste, into storm sewers. Contrary to popular belief, storm sewers do not carry stormwater to sewage treatment plants. Instead, most storm sewers direct stormwater into local lakes, streams, and wetlands or directly into Puget Sound. During high rain events, animal waste from pets, livestock, and wildlife can be a significant source of surface water pollution.

Although animal waste is not always a problem, large quantities of untreated animal waste can harm our environment. First, animal wastes contain nutrients that can promote algae growth in our lakes and streams. Second, animal wastes from dogs and cats may carry disease causing organisms that can make water unsafe for swimming, fishing, and drinking.

How many dogs and cats are there?

Well, there is no official doggie or cat census, and many people do not license their dogs or cats, so there are no hard numbers indicating Snohomish County's overall dog or cat population. However, we can estimate the number of pets people keep.

Research conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association shows that 37.4 percent of Washington State households own dogs, with an average of 1.5 dogs per household. In 2005, the US Census Bureau reported there were 252,417 households in Snohomish County. This calculates out to approximately 141,500 dogs in Snohomish County in 2005.

How much Poop is being produced?

Dogs excrete on average 0.33 pounds of poop per day which is not including urine. Therefore, at an estimated rate of 0.33 pounds of solid waste produced daily per dog, the estimated daily production of dog waste in Snohomish County is over 46,000 pounds. That's more than 20 tons of dog poo dropped in our backyards, sidewalks, and parks every day!
Every day!

What can you do with all this Poo?

Pet waste is most likely not the most toxic pollutant in our urban surface waters but it is just one more contributing factor to the overall problem degrading water quality in our lakes, streams, and Puget Sound. Fortunately, there are easy steps pet owners can take in order to help reduce water pollution from pet waste.

First, picking up after your pet is instrumental. After picking up your pet's "little present" there are a few options one can choose from. They are as follows:

1. Dog and cat waste can be flushed down your toilet as long as you are connected to a sewer system (**NOT ON A SEPTIC SYSTEM**). Cat litter should not be flushed as the clay it contains can clog your sewer pipes and or toilet.
2. If you choose to bury your pet waste, be sure to dig a hole at least eight inches deep and cover the waste with at least 5 inches of soil. Keep in mind to not bury near surface waters or near food/vegetable gardens; pet feces contain some harmful pathogens and should not be handled.
3. You can also collect the waste in a plastic bag, seal securely, and dispose the waste in your trash can assuming your local waste management company allows this practice.