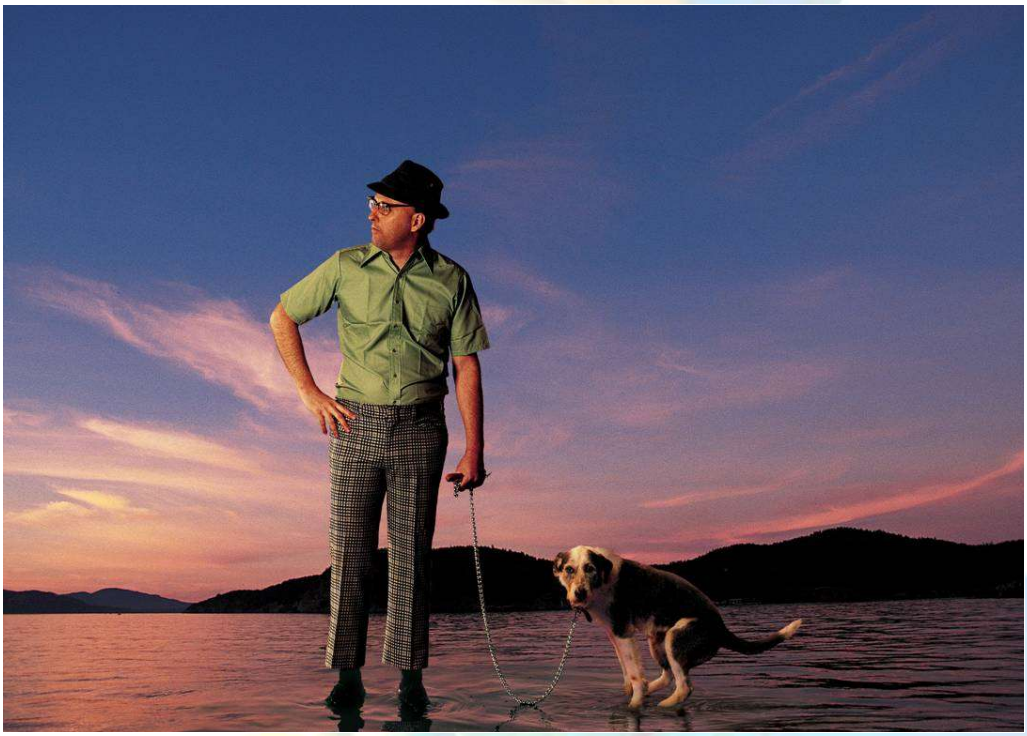

Water Quality: A Citizen's Guide

GREATER LANSING REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

www.mywatersheds.org

Pick Up After Your Pet: It's Polite AND Protects the Environment!

When our little friends leave those little surprises, rain runoff washes that pet waste (and its bacteria) into storm drains. Since storm sewers discharge into rivers, lakes, and streams without undergoing any treatment, bacteria from pet waste can enter our shared surface waters, impair water quality, and make it unsafe for aquatic life and human health. Pet waste is also a nuisance in our neighborhoods, parks, and natural areas.

Pre-settlement, animal waste would decompose and filter through soils before reaching water resources. Today, we've added concrete, asphalt, and other impervious surfaces to the environment, preventing water from naturally infiltrating the soil and requiring communities to move would-be flood waters through ditches and pipes and into water bodies. With 80% of people (therefore, most of the 80 million dogs) living in these developed areas where stormwater isn't treated, the impact of pet waste contaminated runoff is amplified. It doesn't always stay where it's left, as its bacteria can be swept up and concentrated downstream. And considering that dogs are relative newcomers to the ecosystem that produce 10 million tons of waste each year in the U.S alone, their impact is significant.

When beaches are closed in the summer, it's often due to high levels of bacteria, especially E. coli. While failing septic tanks, wildlife, and poorly managed livestock also introduce bacteria into the watershed, pet waste is a major contributor. In fact, due to the high protein, highly processed diets of modern dogs, their waste can contain more bacteria and pathogens by weight than that of cows. Just one gram of dog waste can contain as many as 23 million fecal coliform bacteria! Salmonella, giardia, and other bacteria and parasites in dog waste can spread disease and impair water quality. Pets aren't the only source, but their impact can be easily reduced by the actions of their owners.

How Can Picking Up After Your Pet Help Keep Our Environment Clean?

You can help keep our lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and groundwater clean by applying the following tips.

- **Bring A Bag.** Carry a bag (preferably biodegradable) when walking pets and be sure to pick up after them. Clean up pet waste in your yard frequently.
- **Clean It Up.** Pick up after your pets before watering your yard or cleaning patios and driveways. Never hose pet waste into the street or gutter.

- **Dispose of the Waste.** Throw it away with the household trash, flush it, or bury small quantities in your yard where it can decompose slowly. Dig a hole one foot deep. Put three to four inches of waste at the bottom of the hole. Cover the waste with at least eight inches of soil. Bury the waste in several different locations in your yard but keep it away from vegetable gardens!

In recent years sources of pollution like industrial wastes from factories have been greatly reduced. Now more than 60 percent of water pollution comes from things like residential car washing, cars leaking oil, fertilizers from farms, lawns, and gardens, pet waste and failing septic tanks. All these sources add up to a big pollution problem. But each of us can do small things to help clean up our water too, and that adds up to a pollution solution!

Having a clean environment is of primary importance for our health and economy. Clean waterways provide recreation, commercial opportunities, fish habitat, and add beauty to our landscape. All of us benefit from clean water - and all of us have a role in getting and keeping our lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater clean. For more easy steps on protecting our lakes and streams, visit www.mywatersheds.org.