

Polite Pet Ownership is Picking Up!

Most of us pick up after our pets to be good neighbors and to keep our yards clean. In fact, in Fort Wayne, picking up pet waste is required by law. Picking up pet waste is also a way that citizens can help protect the environment – especially our ponds, streams and rivers.

Leaving pet waste on the lawn or sidewalk makes it more likely that the material will be washed into a storm sewer during a rain storm. Storm sewers discharge directly to ponds, ditches, streams and rivers, so whatever is picked up by a storm sewer goes directly to a water body without any kind of treatment. Pet waste contains bacteria that are harmful to water quality. In fact, the bacteria in pet waste can make people sick when they come into contact with polluted water. And as pet waste breaks down in the water it promotes the growth of weeds and algae which, in turn, can reduce the amount of oxygen in the water and affect fish and other aquatic life.

Although you may not think of picking up pet waste as something you enjoy doing, this simple, thoughtful activity can have an impact on water quality.

In your yard or on a walk, your pet's waste should be picked up promptly and disposed of in the trash or by flushing it down the toilet so that it can receive proper treatment. If you're putting it in the trash, consider sealing it in a plastic bag prior to disposal to contain the material and the smell. Tip: put the plastic bag over your hand and use it as a glove for picking up the waste material.

Feces from wild geese living in the City can be another significant source of waterborne bacteria. A single goose can leave behind as much as six pounds of waste per day. If geese are living in your neighborhood, especially near a pond, resist the temptation to feed them. Feeding ducks and geese makes them more dependent on humans and less likely to migrate during the winter. Encouraging them to stay in your neighborhood by feeding them also makes them more likely to nest, breed and increase the nuisance population.

The Environmental Protection Agency website has more information on how you can help protect water resources. Visit the EPA at www.epa.gov/adopt/ for more information on things you can do to "Adopt Your Watershed."