



# REDUCE NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION

*in Louisiana Waters*

## Pet Waste Management

Every time it rains, the potential exists for thousands of pounds of pet waste to contaminate the waterways of our state. Pet waste that is left on sidewalks, roads, driveways, parks and yards can mix with rainfall and travel to storm drains and surface waters.

The improper disposal of pet waste can result in animal feces becoming a source of run-off pollution in nearby waterways. As pet waste decays in water, it uses up the oxygen and may release ammonia. Warm water with low oxygen levels and the presence of ammonia can be detrimental to the health of fish and other aquatic life. Pet wastes also contain the nutrients that promote algae and weed growth in water. Cloudy, green water is unattractive or even prohibitive for swimming and recreation.

Pet waste also contains bacteria, viruses and parasites that can be harmful to human health, threaten wildlife and contribute to the closure of shellfish beds. A single gram of dog feces can contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria. Diseases or parasites that can be spread from pet waste include:

- Campylobacteriosis – a bacterial infection causing diarrhea in humans.
- Cryptosporidium – a protozoan parasite carried by many mammals that causes diarrhea, nausea, stomach cramps and dehydration in humans.
- Salmonellosis – the most common bacterial infection transmitted to humans from animals; symptoms include fever, muscle aches, headache, vomiting and diarrhea.
- Toxocariasis – roundworms transmitted from animals to humans. Symptoms include vision loss, rash, fever or cough.
- Toxoplasmosis – a serious health concern for pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals caused by a parasite found in cats feces; flu-like symptoms; can cause damage to brain, eyes and other organs.

Pet owners are encouraged to collect their animal's waste so it will not wash into waterways or storm drains. Storm drains do not connect to wastewater treatment facilities. They drain directly into lakes, bayous, canals and rivers. Pet waste that remains on the lawn can pose a hazard to pets, children playing outside and adults gardening. Collected pet waste can be placed in a plastic bag and disposed of in trash. Empty bread bags or the plastic bag in which the newspaper is delivered are convenient to use.

Use a long handle scooper to retrieve the waste without bending down or getting close to it. Used cat litter and cat waste should be sealed securely in a plastic bag and disposed in the trash. Flushing pet waste down the toilet can contribute to overburdening of the sewer treatment plant in some cities.

Pet waste can be buried in the yard or treated in an underground pet digester in the yard. Bury pet wastes in a hole at least 1 foot deep. Place 3 to 4 inches of waste at the bottom, mix the waste with the soil and cover with at least 8 inches of soil to prevent pets and other animals from digging them up. Burial is not recommended in areas with poor drainage or a high water table.

Pet waste digester systems work the same way septic systems do. These small in-ground systems have two parts: the digester unit with lid and the digester mix. It liquefies the waste and drains the liquid into the surrounding soil. Never locate burial areas or digesters near drinking water wells, surface waters, storm drains or vegetable gardens.

Feeding ducks, geese, gulls and other waterfowl encourages them to stay, overpopulating the area and creating more waste that endangers the water. Nature provides a meal plan for these creatures. In addition to nitrogen and phosphorus in their waste that can cause eutrophication, waterfowl droppings contain high levels of fecal coliform bacteria.

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