Why is Pet Waste Such a Big Deal to Our Water Quality?

Salt Lake County (or insert your city name) is working with residents and businesses to keep our water sources clean. We hope you will join us by keeping pet wastes out of our streams, canals, rivers and lakes.

When you clean up after your pet, do you bag and trash it? That’s exactly the right thing to do! When the trash collector picks up your weekly garbage, it is taken to the landfill facility, which by design, is located at the very bottom of our watershed. That way *all* of the potential problem-solving components of the trash don’t get carried through our waterways.

Dog poop, if left to decay on the sidewalk, gutter or on the grass near the street, breaks down and is eventually washed into the storm drainage system by rain or melting snow. NONE of the water in gutters, storm drains, creeks, rivers and lakes in Salt Lake County goes to a water treatment plant.

You might have wondered why dog poop is any different from the waste wildlife. There are 2 reasons why dog poop is such a big deal: 1) Dogs are carnivores, and their waste contains much higher concentrations of bacteria than most wildlife that consume resources from their ecosystem,. Dogs are fed nutrient-heavy pet foods designed to give them a complete diet. A single pile of pet waste will continue to release nutrients every time it rains, until it’s all flushed away; and 2) pet waste added to the waste of wildlife, make too high of a concentration of the bacteria/pollutants ends up in the waterways. A single gram of dog waste can contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria and parasites. Parasite eggs dispersed from feces can survive for years in outdoor areas. These pathogens can be passed on to other dogs or humans and gets washed into lakes and rivers where people swim.

When pet waste reaches the streams, canals, rivers or lakes, the waste decays, using up oxygen and releasing ammonia. Low oxygen levels and ammonia combined with warm temperatures kill fish. Pet waste also contains nutrients that encourage weed and algae growth. Overly fertile water becomes cloudy, slimy, and green/black, as a result of [eutrophication](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LAT1gLMPu4), which causes health concerns for swimmers, boaters, and fish, and for the waterbodies.

Perhaps most importantly, pet waste carries diseases which could make water unsafe for contact. In addition to E.coli, additional health concerns include:

* Campylobacteriosis - bacterial infection
* Salmonellosis - bacterial infection
* Toxocariasis - roundworm infection
* Toxoplasmosis - protozoan parasite infection
* Giardiasis - protozoan parasite infection

You can be part of the solution to water pollution—you just need to scoop the poop every time!