

WE'VE STEPPED IN IT NOW!

Richard B. Linderman discusses the impact of pet ownership on communities and the environment in *Community Trends* magazine.

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Merde! Sitt, kaka, dritt, mierda, mut, crap, poo-poo, dookie, poop. No matter how you say it, you know when you've stepped in it. We're talking about canine feces, commonly known as "dog poop." For the sake of this article and our delicate reading audience, this author will stick with "poop."

To ensure that everyone knows where this author is coming from, he loves dogs. He has had dogs as pets since he was seven years old. This author thinks dogs are the best (it is cats that he hates). However, in

the universe of community associations, dogs can pose their own unique set of potential issues and problems.

Statista Research Department reports that as of 2017, there were approximately 89.7 million dogs living in U.S. households. That is a 31.9% increase from the 68 million dogs reported in 2000. This means that there is approximately one pet dog for every four Americans. Over 55% of all U.S. households own pets, and this explosion in pet ownership appears to be surprisingly driven by the baby boomer generation. According to Good News For Pets (GNFP) and the research firm Packaged Facts, there has been a 6% jump in pet ownership in adults in the 70+ age group. In addition, pet ownership among the generation of millennials (ages 18 - 34) has risen sharply. GNFP states that one reason that millennials have gravitated toward pet ownership is that 69% believe that "having a pet is a good way to get ready to have a family."

But all of this tail-wagging fun and companionship comes with a cost and affects the community and environment. The consequences of dog crap have been the subject of numerous studies and research projects. According to results from

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UCLA, if you formed a country solely populated by the world's dogs and cats, that country would eat more meat than Russia or the whole European Union (28 countries). In fact, that petocracy (or would it be a catatorship?) would be the fifth-largest consumer of meat on the planet. That adds up to a huge carbon impact. A 2009 study from New Zealand's Victoria University of Wellington equated owning a dog to the environmental impact of driving two SUVs. The UCLA study published that household pets (primarily dogs and cats) create the equivalent of 64 million tons of carbon dioxide per year, approximately the same environmental impact as driving 13.6 million cars per year.

But, you say, I don't care about all this global environmental BS! Fair enough, let's bring it local — to your backyard. Sure it smells bad and it's annoyingly difficult to get out of the treads of a nice pair of running shoes. Sure it leaves yellow spots on the lawn and kills the flowers, but that's not really that bad. The scary part is what is in the poop.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has tasked significant resources toward the impact of dog feces. What's in poop, fecal coliform bacteria and fecal coliform bacteria, is nasty stuff. One of the most common factors causing beaches or swimming pools to close is of fecal coliform. Exposure to fecal coliform can lead to skin rashes, pink eye, cramps, diarrhea, meningitis, respiratory

infections, hepatitis and severe kidney and intestinal illness. According to Amy Miller, with the public affairs office of the EPA, one large dog creates 7.8 billion coliform bacteria a day. Dena Krebs, a spokeswoman for DoodyCalls pet waste management service, stated that "a single gram of dog feces can contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria."- Aside from the fecal coliform, a dog's waste contains viruses which can lead to other nasty problems, mainly the stomach flu.

According to the EPA, it is a myth that dog poop is good as fertilizer or plantings. Dog poop does not easily decompose and go away. If that poop is not properly picked up and disposed of, it will either sit in place until it is tracked around town or into your house on your shoes or your pet, or it will be washed into the local storm drain and end up in your water supply. The EPA states that two to three days' worth of dog waste from 100 dogs would contribute enough bacteria to temporarily close a "bay, and all watershed areas within 20 miles of it, to swimming and shellfishing."

Since 1991, the EPA has listed dog waste as a "nonpoint source pollutant," putting it in the same category as oil, grease, herbicides and insecticides. That dastardly doo-doo isn't just bad for you and

me; it also kills the wildlife living in our ponds, streams and lakes. Dog poop releases minerals and biomaterial that leads to algae blooms which are those large pea-green floating clumps that cloud up the surfaces of ponds and lakes. Those floating clumps draw the oxygen out of the water, choking the plants, fish and other animals that live there.

The problem has gotten so bad in some communities that the city of Hoboken, New Jersey has tasked an undercover police unit with identifying the local dog owners who refuse to pick up their dogs' waste. The Hoboken City Council unanimously approved a law in March 2019 which set fines for failing to pick up after your dog with ranges from \$250 to \$2,000. The problem has even spawned a subindustry wherein Community Association Institute partner, PooPrints operates a service which allows communities to register the DNA of its residents' pets and check it against poop left behind. The aforementioned DoodyCails offers pet waste removal services along the East Coast.

If you're prepared to do it yourself (and you should be), the easiest way to pick up after your dog is to use a

biodegradable bag and place it in the garbage. The best way, according to the EPA, is to pick up the poop with a reusable container and then flush it (without the bag) down the toilet. Dog poop is easily processed alongside its human counterpart.

[Side note, according to PETMD, cat feces should never be flushed, as it may contain the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which can infect people. Municipal water treatment systems are not always prepared to treat water to properly kill this parasite.]

Whether you're a dog lover or not, dogs are here to stay. In fact, this author believes they'll likely outlive humanity. It, therefore, falls to communities to create reasonable rules for living with our pets. It also is each pet owner's job to respect our neighbors and keep our poop to ourselves.

P.S. The author really doesn't hate cats. That was a joke. However, he does have a tremendous fear of guinea pigs.