



# Pet Waste and Water Quality

**Storm water samples collected in Wisconsin cities almost always have high levels of bacteria which violate water quality standards. Common sources of bacteria include sanitary sewer overflows, pets and urban wildlife.**

**P**et owners, take heed... When you clean up after your pet, do you dump the waste in the street or storm sewer? Do you leave it to decay on the sidewalk or the grass near the street? If so, you may be causing pollution or health problems.

## **Are you polluting our Lakes and streams?**

Pollutants from improperly disposed pet waste may be washed into storm sewers by rain or melting snow. Storm sewers usually drain *directly* into our lakes and streams, carrying many pollutants along with the water.

Pollutants commonly found in urban lakes, streams and ponds include:

- Pet Waste
- Oil and antifreeze
- Sediment
- Toxic chemicals
- Pesticides and fertilizers

## **Are you risking your health?**

When pet waste is disposed of improperly, not only water quality suffers – your health may be at risk, too. Pets, children who play outside, and adults who garden are most at risk for infection from some of the bacteria and parasites found in pet waste. Flies may also spread diseases from animal waste. Diseases or parasites that can be transmitted from pet waste to humans include:

**Campylobacteriosis** – A bacterial infection carried by dogs and cats that frequently causes diarrhea in humans.

**Cryptosporidium** – A protozoan parasite carried by dogs, cats, mice, calves and many other mammals. Common symptoms include diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea and dehydration. May be fatal to people with depressed immune systems.

**Toxocariasis** – Roundworms usually transmitted from dogs to humans, often without noticeable symptoms, but may cause vision loss, a rash, fever, or cough.

**Toxoplasmosis** – A protozoan parasite carried by cats that can cause birth defects such as mental retardation and blindness if a woman becomes infected during pregnancy; also a problem for people with depressed immune systems. Symptoms include headache, muscle aches, lymph node enlargement.



When pet waste is washed into lakes or streams the waste decays, using up oxygen and sometimes releasing ammonia. Low oxygen levels and ammonia combined with warm temperatures can kill fish.

Pet waste also contains nutrients that encourage weed and algae growth. Overly fertile water becomes cloudy and green – unattractive for swimming, boating and fishing.

Perhaps most importantly, pet waste carries diseases which make water unsafe for swimming or drinking.

Pet waste may not be the largest or most toxic pollutant in urban waterways, but it is one of the many little sources of pollution that add up to a big problem. Fortunately, there are some simple things we can all do to help keep our water clean. See the other side for ways to keep pet waste out of local waterways.

