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Be a Good Neighbor: Pick up after Your Pet

It is important for dog walkers and owners to remember that it is your responsibility to pick up after your dog. As dog populations continue to rise, dog waste has become a bigger concern than it may have been in the past. Stepping in dog waste can be an embarrassing experience for anyone and especially for a child on a playing field or on the way to school.

As a dog walker or owner, be prepared to pick up after your dog whenever you take your dog outside. Excuses such as “*it will eventually go away,*” “*it’s in the woods,*” “*small dog, small waste,*” “*it’s fertilizer,*” and “*it’s too much work,*” are not acceptable. Picking up your dog’s waste is as simple as taking along a waste disposal bag. Your local pet supply store may sell rolls of bio degradable or compostable dog waste disposal bags that can be attached to your dog’s leash. Some are even scented. After you have picked up your dog’s waste, carry it with you until you can dispose of it properly. Never dispose of it in a street catch basin because this may cause other problems such as flooding from a clogged drain. In addition, the plastic bag may pollute water and land downstream.

Dog feces has a high bacteria count. However, when it is left out in the environment in the grass or on the sidewalk, temperature change, direct sunlight and moisture loss quickly and effectively reduces bacteria count in dog feces. Some bacteria may cause disease. Disease transmission from animal to human (*Zoonosis*) is more of a concern with wildlife feces than with domestic pet dog feces. Pet dogs usually make regular visits to a veterinarian and are checked for canine zoonosis, so there is low risk for disease transmission from dog feces to humans. In addition, proper personal hygiene and hand washing after outdoor activities will also reduce the risk of any potential disease transmission. In conclusion, dog feces piles are primarily an aesthetic problem or something not nice to see in the environment, on the grass, in a playground or on a sidewalk.

Removing and disposing of your dog’s waste is the law in Belmont, and not doing so is punishable by a fine of up to \$50 (*Belmont Bylaw § 60-200D (1-4)*). But the real reason to pick up dog waste is not because of the law; it is because it is the right thing to do. No one likes to step in dog waste. And certainly no one enjoys seeing piles of dog waste in public places. By picking up your dog’s waste, you are acting as a good neighbor to the people and land around you.

For more information, please contact the Belmont Health Department, Wesley Chin, Health Director at 617-993-2720. This important message was brought to you by the Belmont Board of Health.

