

Safe Pet Waste Disposal Methods & Frequently Asked Questions

Scoop the poop, bag it, and place it in the trash!

Scoop the poop, bag it, and place it in the trash!

This is the preferred disposal method. It removes the pollution source from surface water contact and contains it in a landfill situation where discharges are monitored and containment levels are known.

Can I flush pet waste down the toilet?

For those on a municipal sewer system, yes. This is can be a safe disposal method.

For those on a septic system, *no*. Roughly 30 percent of Snohomish County homes are on septic systems. For those residences, flushing pet waste can exceed the design capacity of the septic system. High volumes of hair and ash, not normally found in human waste, can interfere with septic system functions and clog drain fields.

Can I bury or compost pet waste?

Composting and burial are not good ideas. They do not kill hazardous pathogens that may be in the waste and can pollute water.

Most home compost piles don't reach temperatures sufficient to kill many hazardous pathogens. Extended exposure at 140 degree temperatures is required to kill *E. coli* and *Salmonella*. *Giardia* can survive temperature extremes, chlorination, and drying. *Cryptosporidium*, *Leptospira*, *Salmonella*, and *E. coli* can survive for months in feces or soil. Roundworms can survive for four years in soil.

Placing dog waste in yard waste collection bins for curbside pickup is equally bad. Even commercial yard waste processors do not currently compost waste at temperatures sufficient to kill many pathogens in pet waste.

We estimate a countywide population of 169,900 dogs that collectively produce fecal waste equivalent to a city of 45,600 people. Burying or composting that much waste is little different than a city of broken septic systems.

How about pet waste digesters and doggie septic systems?

Commercially produced pet waste digesters are no better than burial, since they essentially function like broken septic systems. Evidence suggests frequent dysfunction in these systems.

Manufacturer literature indicates that they do not function properly where water tables are high, in low temperatures, and in some soil types common to our area. Manufacturer literature also cites reduced performance when used with dog foods containing high ash levels, which are common in many low-cost dog foods.

Even assuming these devices function as designed, there is little if any evidence that they treat waste sufficiently to meet desired standards. Remember, pet waste is sewage just like human waste; using such a device to treat an equivalent amount of human waste is prohibited by law.

The devices are also expensive from the homeowner point of view (typically \$35-\$100 for the device and \$30+ for a supply of "digester"), require installation, and require frequent maintenance (some recommend daily addition of water and "digester" every few days).

The Poop Solution

Scoop the poop, bag it,
and put it in the trash.



Isn't landfilling bad? Shouldn't we do things more naturally?

We certainly want to reduce our waste stream to landfills. When it comes to pet waste, however, there is currently no better alternative.

There is nothing "natural" about 169,900 dogs concentrated in an area the size of Snohomish County's urban and suburban areas. Native wildlife populations do not reach that density. The question, then, is how we deal with the waste produced by this unnatural concentration of animals.

Burial, composting, waste digesters, and letting it lay in yards contaminate water and jeopardizes human and pet health. Flushing is impractical for most people.

At some point in the future, commercial composting technology may be sufficient to treat pet waste, enabling curbside pickup along with yard waste.

Until then, landfilling is the best alternative for pet waste. Landfills are designed to safely handle substances such as dog waste, cat litter, and dirty diapers. Yards are not.

Compost your yard waste. Scoop the poop, bag it, and place it in the trash.



How many dogs are there?

There is no doggie census, and many people do not license their dogs, so there are no hard numbers indicating Snohomish County's dog population. Instead, we estimate dog populations based on the best available research.

Research conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association shows that 36.5 percent of Washington State households own dogs, with an average of 1.6 dogs per dog-owning household.

That means just over 110,000 Snohomish County households own dogs, based on U.S. Census 2010 data. At 1.6 dogs per household, we estimate the Snohomish County dog population at more than 169,900 dogs.

How much waste do they produce?

At an estimated rate of 0.75 pounds of solid waste produced daily per dog, the estimated daily production of dog waste in Snohomish County is 127,440 pounds per day. That's more than 64 tons per day!

Based on body weight, we estimate the countywide dog population to roughly equivalent to a human population of 45,600.

Want more information?

Visit: www.petwaste.surfacewater.info

Or call: 425-388-3464



Snohomish County
Public Works
Surface Water Management

3000 Rockefeller Ave., M/S 607
Everett, WA 98201-4046