

## **PET WASTE AND WATER QUALITY**

Pet 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 and health problems.

### **Are you polluting our rivers?**

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

When pet waste is washed into the river 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.

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

When pet waste is disposed of improperly, 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 can be transmitted from pet waste to humans.

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.

### **What should you do with the waste you pick up?**

#### *1 Flush it down the toilet . . .*

The water from your toilet goes to a septic system or sewage treatment plant that removes most pollutants before the water reaches the river. To prevent plumbing problems, do not try to flush debris such as rocks, sticks or cat litter. Cat feces may be scooped out and flushed down the toilet, but used litter should be put in a securely closed bag in the trash.

#### *2 Put it in the trash*

When taking your pets for a walk, carry a bag, shovel, or pooper scooper. Any waste left by the animal should be cleaned up immediately.

Always remove waste from areas where children play. They are the most frequent victims of diseases from pet waste.

Adapted from University of Wisconsin–Extension in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. (1999). *Pet Waste and Water Quality*. [Brochure]. Author: Johnson, C.