

# Clean Waters

*Starting in Your Home and Yard*



Photo Credit: Nicole Jacobson

## *Animal Waste and Water Quality*

*The City of Medina is excited to promote Clean Waters - a mission to educate individuals about the impacts of everyday activities on water quality and simple techniques that help protect water resources from the home well to Medina's various watersheds.*

It's first thing in the morning and the dog wants to go out right NOW, the cats standing by their litter box waiting for some fresh kitty litter, and your toddler is demanding a trip to the park to feed the ducks. While none of these activities may sound like a major threat to the environment, animal waste is one of the many little sources of pollution that can add up to big problems for water quality and may cause human health problems as well. While most people connect animal waste problems to agriculture, studies have shown that pets, waterfowl and other urban wildlife waste can cause significant water pollution problems.

Animal waste contains several types of pollutants that contribute to water quality problems: nutrients, pathogens and a naturally toxic material, ammonia. When animal waste ends up in a lake, stream, or Lake Independence, it decomposes, using up oxygen and releasing its pollutant load. During summer months when the water is warm, the combination of low oxygen levels and ammonia can kill fish and other aquatic organisms. The nutrients cause excessive growth of aquatic weeds and algae. When these conditions make the water murky green and smelly, or when the surface of the water

is completely covered with a thick mat of vegetation, the area becomes unattractive or unusable for swimming, boating or fishing.

Pathogens, the disease-causing bacteria and viruses associated with animal waste, can also make water unsafe for human use. If pathogens or the indicator bacteria associated with animal waste are found during water testing, beaches may be closed to swimming and drinking water supplies may require expensive filtration or disinfection.

Fortunately, there are some simple practices everyone can do to help prevent pollution by keeping animal waste out of the water. While it may seem easier to ignore the problem of animal waste, remember that you are protecting not only the environment but also your own health.



Oaklee

Photo Credit: Derek & Sydney Reinking



2

Fact Sheet

February 2021

# Keeping Animal Waste Out of Medina's Water

## 1. Pick Up After Your Pet

- ❖ Preventing water pollution can be as simple as remembering to take along a plastic bag or pooper scooper when you walk your dog.
- ❖ For both "quality of life" and public health reasons, [Provision 345 of Medina's City Code Book](#) requires anyone taking their animal off of their property to clean up the waste after the pet relieves itself.



## Waste-Borne Diseases

Some of the more common waste-borne diseases and their symptoms are the following.

## 2. Keep Your Yard Clean

- ❖ While there are no laws requiring you to clean up animal waste on your own property, there are good reasons to be careful where you leave it to decay.
  - Campylobacteriosis causes diarrhea in humans.
  - Salmonellosis has symptoms including fever, headache, vomiting and diarrhea.
  - Toxocariasis is a roundworm that may cause a rash, fever, and cough or vision loss.
  - Toxoplasmosis, a protozoan parasite that can cause severe birth defects if a woman becomes infected during pregnancy, is the reason pregnant women are told to avoid handling used kitty litter. This parasite can also cause problems for people with weak immune systems. Symptoms include headache, muscle aches and lymph node enlargement.
- ❖ Some diseases can be transmitted from pet waste to humans through soil contact. Children who play outside and adults that garden are most at risk for infection, so cleaning up waste from play and garden areas is especially important.
- ❖ Washing hands with anti-bacterial soap and water after working or playing in the dirt is the best protection from disease.



## Please Don't Feed Bread To The Ducks & Geese

### Why not?

Regular feeding of bread (especially white) / cakes / biscuits etc. can cause .....

- Poor nutrition
- Spread of disease
- Unnatural behaviour
- Water pollution
- Overcrowding
- Delayed migration
- Rats (encouraged by uneaten bread)
- Uneaten bread floating around doesn't look very nice!



### What should they eat?

The bird's natural diet can feature.....

- Grass
- Plants from the lake
- Seeds & berries
- Insects
- Shellfish
- Even small fish and frogs in some cases!

Specialist waterfowl feed or grains can be purchased from many pet shops, garden centres and online retailers.

Please help take care of ducks and geese by allowing them to enjoy their natural diet so we can enjoy seeing them for years to come!

## 3. Don't Feed Waterfowl

- ❖ While one of the pleasures of a trip to the park has always been taking stale bread to feed the ducks, the environmental and health impacts of this activity for both humans and birds can be serious.
- ❖ While ducks, geese and swans all love bread, it lacks in the nutrients and roughage of their natural diet. Feeding these birds bread is similar to feeding a small child a diet of candy and soda; they may love it, but it does them no good and may cause long-term health problems.
- ❖ Feeding waterfowl also tends to cause the birds to concentrate in numbers higher than can be supported by the natural food supplies. This can cause problems in the winter months when fewer people come to the park or shore with food.

- ❖ These large flocks of birds also create large quantities of waste and the serious water pollution problems described earlier in this fact sheet.

## 4. Dispose of Kitty Litter Properly

- ❖ When cleaning out the litter box, a two-step approach is most effective.
  - ❖ Cat waste and litter should be bagged, sealed and placed in the trash. Dumping the entire contents of the litter box down your toilet will cause plumbing problems and pre-maturely fill up your septic tank or sewer system with indigestible material.
- While it may not seem like a big deal if one more dog, cat or bird "contributes" some waste to the neighborhood environment, think about how many animals there are out there.



Animal waste may not be the biggest or most toxic pollutant going into your local waters, but it is one of those little problems that, when all the pieces are added together, leads to serious environmental and health problems.

So please think twice about your pet's bathroom habits and do your part to help keep our waters and environment clean.

