



PHOTO BY LOREN BALINGIT

# Not My Pet!

**My pet can't be part of a water pollution problem! My pet is a member of the family. He watches TV with me on the sofa. He sleeps in my lap.**

Of course, it's not your pet alone, and sure, you keep your pet clean. The pollution results when we add all of our pets together. Research by the American Pet Products Manufacturers' Association shows that 40 percent of U.S. households have at least one dog. Based on public information survey results, our stormwater experts estimate that there are approximately 40,000–45,000 dogs in Tallahassee.

**This isn't just a problem in our community.** Water pollution from pet waste inevitably occurs when we concentrate ourselves—and our pets—into cities. **There is no sewage treatment for pet waste.** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that two to three days of pet waste from just 100 dogs in a 20-square-mile watershed can contribute enough bacteria to temporarily close a bay to swimming and shell fishing (*U.S. EPA, 1993*). Pet waste also contributes to nutrient pollution in our local waterways.

*In Tallahassee it is the law to pick up after your pets in public spaces.*  
(TALLAHASSEE CODE OF ORDINANCES NO. 08-O-23AA)



**Why pick on dogs? Well, here is what studies are indicating:**

Animal type	Average fecal coliforms (intestinal bacteria) per gram of feces	Fecal coliform load per day
DOG	23,000,000	7,728,000,000
HUMAN	13,000,000	1,921,920,000
MOUSE	330,000	(Data unavailable)
COW	230,000	5,358,080,000
HORSE	12,600	293,529,600
WILD RABBIT	20	(Data unavailable)

*SOURCE:* [www.co.thurston.wa.us/shellfish/pdf/HENDERSON2003.pdf](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/shellfish/pdf/HENDERSON2003.pdf)  
T.A. Determan, *Coastal Currents*, January, 1993

**So, as you can see, there's a special problem with dogs.** Dogs are built to eat almost anything and they have a large number of diverse intestinal bacteria to deal with that wide variety of food. Combine that with the sheer numbers of dogs we have crammed into our little town of 100 square miles and the problem becomes significant.

**Yes, there are animals in nature but they aren't concentrated the way we've concentrated our pets.** Sure, there are wild animals all around us and they've always been here. But look at the chart again. Wild rabbits have only 20 fecal bacteria per gram of waste. And mice, which most of us think of as relatively unsanitary, have only 330,000 per gram compared to 23 million per gram in dog waste. Even horses come in with only 12,600 fecal coliforms per gram. Dogs win this race.

**We import nutrients to feed our pets.** Wild animals eat what's available in the natural landscape. For pets, we buy food that's shipped in and then later deposited on the ground as waste, thereby increasing local nutrient loads. *Besides, just because we can't affect the entire problem of water pollution, we shouldn't ignore the part we can control.* It's an issue of hygiene, goodwill ...and good sense. Over half the residents of our community *don't* have pets and shouldn't have to deal with what ours leave behind.

**So... what to do with pet waste?**

- **Bury it in the yard.**
- **Put it in the trash receptacle.**
- **Flush it down the toilet (without the bag).**

Recommendations from the U.S.EPA: [www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/other/wiexpets.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/other/wiexpets.pdf)

**THINK ABOUT PERSONAL POLLUTION:** *Protecting our water quality takes effort from all of us together. For more information visit [www.TAPPwater.org](http://www.TAPPwater.org) or call 850-891-6860.*

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