

Citizen Engagement Corner: The scoop on poop in Brookline

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Since the 1960s, the League of Women Voters, nationwide, has been at the forefront of efforts to protect air, land and water resources. How does this relate to dog ownership? Dogs reduce stress, provide lessons in care and responsibility for children, provide opportunities for daily exercise and are generally a loved member of any family they belong to. They do have their downside. They poop.

Why does this matter? The poop does not just disappear. When left on streets and lawns or in a park, it is absorbed into the ground and becomes part of our groundwater – groundwater that feeds our local lakes, ponds and rivers. If it rains before it is absorbed into the ground, it becomes part of storm water runoff and joins the rainwater as it flows into our drains and directly into the Muddy River or our local ponds.

Why is this a problem? Dog poop contains nutrients that can be harmful to our water. If it is not properly disposed of, it goes directly into our groundwater, contaminates ponds and rivers, and evaporates into the atmosphere, only to reappear in our rain. These nutrients can cause algae blooms, kill fish and make the water unsafe for fishing, swimming and boating.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that a single dog excretes approximately 275 pounds of poop annually. What you can do: Pick up after your dog. Do this carefully and completely and then dispose of these bags properly. Flushing your dog's waste as you do your own is one good option. Sending the bags of poop to a landfill is a bad idea. Piles of poop in landfills can contribute methane into the atmosphere.

Don't do what the people in Canton, Mass., did. Last winter, 3,600 feet of clogged storm drain were discovered. Apparently, locals had been disposing their dogs' scooped poop into catchment drains, and over time, clogged the storm

drains, causing flooding and almost \$9,000 in cleanup costs.

A good option is composting your dog's waste. The USDA has a free publication online entitled "Composting for Dog Waste." Use the compost for plants or lawns, but not for fruits or vegetables for human consumption. Keep tools and compost bins separate, as dog waste can transfer diseases to human beings.

How about replicating what a town in the UK is doing? An inventor in Northern England figured out a way to power a lamppost in a public park. Owners walk their dogs, scoop the poop into paper bags and dispose of them in a box under the light. They stir the contents of the box, which heats the contents and creates methane. The methane is stored until dusk when the lamp is lit. The developer estimates that ten paper bags of poop can light the lamp for two hours.

The League's approach to environmental protection and pollution control is one of problem solving. The League's environmental goals aim to prevent ecological degradation, and to reduce and control pollutants before they go down the sewer, up the chimney or into the landfill.

Prepared and submitted by a member of the League of Women Voters of Brookline. The League is a nonpartisan organization that encourages informed and active participation in government and that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy.