

# Picking Up After Your Pets: Pet Waste & 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 or health problems.

Are you polluting our lakes and streams? Pollutants from improperly disposed pet waste may be washed into storm sewers by rain or melting snow. Storm sewers usually drain directly into our lakes and streams, carrying many pollutants along with the water.

Pollutants commonly found in urban lakes, streams and ponds include:

- Pet Waste • Oil and antifreeze
- Sediment • Toxic chemicals
- Pesticides and fertilizers

When pet waste is washed into lakes or streams 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, not only water quality suffers – 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 that can be transmitted from pet waste to humans include:

**Campylobacteriosis** – A bacterial infection carried by dogs and cats that frequently causes diarrhea in humans.

**Cryptosporidium** – A protozoan parasite carried by dogs, cats, mice, calves and many other

mammals. Common symptoms include diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea and dehydration. May be fatal to people with depressed immune systems.

**Toxocarasis** – Roundworms usually transmitted from dogs to humans, often without noticeable symptoms, but may cause vision loss, a rash, fever, or cough.

**Toxoplasmosis** – A protozoan parasite carried by cats that can cause birth defects such as mental retardation and blindness if a woman becomes infected during pregnancy; also a problem for people with depressed immune systems. Symptoms include headache, muscle aches, lymph node enlargement.

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. Fortunately, there are some simple things we can all do to help keep our water clean:

1. Flush it down the toilet
2. Bury it in the yard about 5 inches deep
3. Put it in the trash. ♡

# Let's Keep Leaves Out of our Streets and Ditches

Although leaves seem “natural” and harmless, excess leaves pose a threat to our bayous, lakes and Galveston Bay’s water quality. Leaves in the street are washed down storm drains and ditches and into nearby bayous and streams when it rains. Once they get into the water and begin to decay, leaves release nutrients contributing to the excess algae in the lakes, making water recreation a less than pleasant experience. Even if the leaves themselves don’t move, rain seeping through leaf piles and leaves crushed by car tires makes a rich “nutrient tea” that flows along the curb into the storm drains.

Harris County Storm Water Quality’s continuing public education effort urges residents to keep leaves out of the street and gutters, and offers alternatives to raking them to the curb by:

1. composting leaves for a nutrient-rich fertilizer for our gardens or till them directly into your garden.
2. chopping the leaves with your lawnmower into small particles that will decompose directly into your lawn.

3. raking leaves and collecting them at the edge of the street—but not in the street or ditch. Make sure to sweep or rake leaves out of the street, gutter or ditch so that they don’t get washed down the storm drain. Wet the leaves down or cover the leaves with a tarp or bag them to prevent them from blowing into the street.
4. Contact your local municipality for the leaf collection dates and requirements (bagging, covered on curb, etc.) for your neighborhood.

Keeping leaves out of the street is a simple but important action that we can all take to help improve water quality in our bayous and streams. The distance between your yard and the water’s edge is as close as the nearest storm drain or ditch. Everyone can help clean the bayous, streams and Galveston Bay by keeping the leaves out of the street and storm drains. ♡

## NEWS SPLASH!

### Updated Storm Water Inlet Marking (SWIM) Brochure Available!

The latest edition of the Storm Water Inlet Marking (SWIM) brochure is available upon request. If you would like to mark your local storm drains with one of our specially designed markers and help deter illegal dumping in your neighborhood, then you’ll find what you need inside. Call us to request yours today! 713-290-3000.

### Christmas Tree Recycling!

Ah Christmas trees - the tradition, the decorations, the aroma, the mulch... That’s right; Christmas trees can be recycled into mulch, which is used for parks, hiking trails, playgrounds and more. Make tree recycling a holiday tradition.

“The conservationist’s most important task, if we are to save the earth, is to educate.”  
- Peter Scott, founder chairman of the World Wildlife Federation, quoted in the Sunday Telegraph, November 6, 1986.

## Just for Floats!



Harris County  
Storm Water Quality Section  
9800 Northwest Freeway, Suite 305  
(713) 290-3000



Did you know that the first toy advertised on television was Mr. Potato Head?

Did you know that during the Christmas/Hanukkah season, more than 1.76 billion candy canes will be made?

Did you know that the first video arcade game was Pong, introduced by Atari in 1972?

Did you know that Barbie's full name is Barbara Millicent Roberts (named for the creator's daughter)?



**Holiday Greetings!**

The staff of Harris County Storm Water Quality Section would like to wish you and your family a happy, healthy and safe Holiday Season.

## STORM WATER QUALITY

Harris County Storm Water Quality Section

# CURRENTS

[www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org](http://www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org)

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## 'Tis the Season to Recycle: Some Holiday Tips



This is the season to give, celebrate and renew. It only takes a small commitment to protect the environment. Here are some simple ways you can make a difference this holiday season:

- Gift Wrap: Bows, bags, fabrics, newspaper comics, magazines and decorative boxes can be used for gift wrap. These items can also be used for holiday décor, and reused every year.
- Trees: Recycle your Christmas tree and find local tree cycling centers by calling the city's information line at 311 or log on to [www.houstonsolidwaste.org](http://www.houstonsolidwaste.org) Do not use tinsel or spray your tree with fake snow, as tinsel and white trees cannot be recycled. You can also use a live, uncut tree and replant it after the holidays.
- Ornaments: Make ornaments at home with items you may normally recycle (e.g. paper towel cardboard rolls, toothpicks or popsicle sticks, old

calendar pictures, old Christmas wrap). Old holiday cards can also be used as ornaments or for holiday décor.

- Energy: Use a timer on your Christmas house and tree lights to avoid keeping lights on all night; you can save a lot of energy this way.
- Cards: Save old Christmas cards and create new cards by cutting the picture off. Old Christmas cards also make great ornaments and holiday décor. Send E-cards and save paper.
- Other Useful Tips: Use dishes, silverware and cloth napkins instead of disposable utensils and paper products. Avoid wasting food by cooking only the amount of food necessary. Lower your thermostat a bit when you are not home and save energy. Visit [www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org](http://www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org) to learn more. ♠

## IN THIS ISSUE

Picking Up After Your Pets: Pet Waste & Water Quality.....	2
Let's Keep Leaves Out of our Streets and Ditches.....	3
Just for Floats.....	4

