



EVERY DOG OWNER'S DUTY

Let's not beat about the bush, dog mess is the unpleasant but unavoidable by-product of owning a companion dog.

It is every owner's moral duty and also their legal responsibility to clean up after their dog.

This factsheet aims to give you as much information as possible on the subject, not only to confirm that you are doing the right thing, but also to ensure that you will have facts at hand to pass on to other dog owners to encourage them to do the same.

The problem

The highly emotive problem of fouling is constantly referred to in arguments against dog ownership and the issue of access for dogs in public places. The UK's millions of dogs produce an estimated thousand tonnes of mess each day. As the authorities cannot be expected to impose separate rules for responsible and irresponsible owners, then it is up to us to 'clean up our act' from within the dog owning community, to safeguard the right to freely exercise our dogs.

Parks and bans

The disgust that dog mess causes to those who have stepped in it, sat by it or seen their local parks and beaches ruined by it through others' laziness, is felt keenly enough by responsible dog owners who walk there every day. The offence and anger this fouling causes to the general public is so great that letters of complaint on the subject are received daily by MPs and councillors across the UK. While these complaints have sometimes resulted in more special bins being provided and awareness raising projects being funded, they have also led to campaigns and policies which punish not only the guilty, selfish owners and their dogs, but all of us. The result? You and your companion could be banned from your own local park.

The countryside

Dog mess is not only a problem in our towns, cities and urban areas. Some owners, visiting the countryside and coasts, seem to forget about their duty when they are out of town. Car parks at popular beauty spots, public forests and heathland are often surrounded by the mess of visiting dogs. Sadly these are often the same areas where other people picnic, children play and all visitors have access. Wherever you are, you must always collect and dispose of your dog's mess thoughtfully.

The law

Local authorities have the power to introduce and enforce dog fouling byelaws under which a person in charge of a dog can be heavily fined for allowing dogs to foul in a public place. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 applies to local authority designated land which may include roads, parks and other public areas within the local authority's boundaries. In fact, they can designate any land which is open to the air and to which the public are entitled or permitted to have access – look out for signs stating this. An offence is committed if a person in charge of a dog fails to clean up its faeces. It is no defence to claim ignorance of the dog's actions, the law, or not to have a device available to remove the faeces. This could result in a prosecution and fine.

Toxocariasis

The rumours and fear regarding the danger to human health from dog faeces has spread throughout the population. Sadly, most people's knowledge of the rare *Toxocara canis* infection is limited to hearsay and hysterical media reports. However the facts are:

- As the eggs of the *Toxocara* worm take over two weeks to hatch and become active, there are no health risks to you from immediately clearing up after your dog.
- In tests, only five per cent of pet dogs were found to expel *Toxocara* worm eggs.
- Of this five per cent, the majority were pups between two weeks and six months of age or pregnant bitches.
- Foxes and cats also act as hosts to the *Toxocara* worm.
- The incidence of all *Toxocara*-induced diseases in the UK is only two cases per million of the population. However, this still means that about 40 people are needlessly ill each year.
- The eggs of the *Toxocara* worm, if deposited in soil, can lie dormant for up to three years, if the conditions are right. They are highly resilient to temperature changes and chemical disinfectants have little effect on them.

The solutions

- If you have a garden, teach your dog to 'go' there, **before you leave home**. The faeces can then be bagged and put straight into your dustbin, burnt or digested in a sunken 'dog-loo'.
- **Always** carry the means to clear up after your dog. Research shows that simple plastic bags are far more convenient, more effective and cheaper than any cumbersome poop scoops. Your bags should be as unforgettable as a lead when you take your dog out.
- **Every time** your dog fouls, 'bag it and bin it' - whether it is in a park or a roadside gutter. Remember the rain **does not** wash the problem away, as some lazy, anti-social people think.
- **Respect** your local authority's rules on dog-free areas. Dogs cannot read signs, so it is up to you to keep them away from children's play areas and sports pitches. If dog waste bins have been provided, then use them. Local authorities monitor their usage to gauge their effectiveness.
- **Get involved** when your local authority is considering new rules on dog access. Keep an eye on the announcements in your local paper, or find details of meetings on posters in your park. If positive views and opinions on dog ownership and the benefits dog walkers have to their communities are not presented, they will never be considered.
- **Never** let your dog out alone to 'go to the loo'. This should go without saying, but does still happen. Apart from the fouling problem, you may never see your companion again.
- **Get your dog wormed regularly**. Visit your veterinary surgery for advice on the products suitable for your pet and how often you will need them.
- **Politely** but **firmly** encourage guilty owners you meet to **do their duty**. You do not need to be rude, simply offer them one of your bags. Embarrassment over their unacceptable behaviour gets better results and is often safer than abuse.
- **Always** wash your hands after a walk or petting your dog and before eating. While *Toxocara* infections are very rare and are more likely to affect children (because of their play habits), remember however, adults can become ill too.

It is every owner's duty to clean up after their dog. **There are no excuses. Fouling is unacceptable.**

You may also be interested in these other factsheets from Dogs Trust: How to be a good dog owner and Help your hound stay happy and healthy

For more information about Dogs Trust, to become a member, sponsor a long-term resident or help us in our campaigns please call 020 7837 0006 or write to:

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