



## Pet Waste Management

When you think of water pollution, you probably do not think of your pet. However, if pet wastes are disposed of incorrectly, they can cause water pollution. More than half of all U.S. households own a dog, cat, or other pet. Although each household only generates a small amount of pet waste, these small amounts can add up to a water quality problem. This worksheet is designed for households that have a few, small animals. If you have a large number of animals in one place, such as a dog kennel, or if you keep large animals such as horses, please refer to HAPPI-Farm 7 on livestock management and HAPPI-Farm 8 on pasture management for additional information.

Droppings from dogs and cats and other commonly kept animals including exotic birds, rabbits, goats, potbellied pigs, and chickens can cause two kinds of problems.

First, pet wastes contain nutrients that can promote the growth of algae if they enter streams and the ocean. Algal blooms change the color of streams and the ocean so you don't want to swim in the water. Algae can also clog streams and destroy habitat for aquatic organisms, such as fish.

Second, animal droppings are a source of pests and disease. Pets, children playing outside, and adults gardening 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 that can be transmitted from pet waste to humans include leptospirosis, campylobacteriosis, salmonellosis, and toxoplasmosis. Although none of these diseases are common in Hawaii, leptospirosis is spread by waste from wild animals including rats and mongooses. In some neighborhoods where many dogs are kept, the dog-dung fly can be an annoying problem.

Pet waste will seldom cause water pollution if you take these simple precautions:

- Clean up waste in areas near water bodies, ditches, and storm drains.
- Don't allow pet waste to accumulate in pens.
- Don't leave pet waste on a sidewalk, street, or driveway where it can be washed into storm drains.
- Always clean up after your pet. In Honolulu, if you do not clean up after your pet, you can be given a ticket and required to pay a fine.

There are three easy ways that you can dispose of pet waste and minimize water pollution risks:

- Flush it down the toilet. To prevent plumbing problems, don't flush debris such as rocks, sticks and cat litter; dispose of these in the trash.
- Put it in the trash. Be sure to put your pet waste in a closed, tied trash bag so that it will not spill during trash collection.
- If you have a yard, you can bury your pet waste. Dig a hole or trench that is about 5 inches deep in an area away from streams or drainage ditches. Put the waste in the hole and cover it with dirt. The waste will break down and release nutrients that will help your plants. But, you need to be careful. To prevent disease, don't bury pet waste near vegetable gardens, and don't add pet waste to your compost pile. Most small household compost piles do not get hot enough to kill the disease organisms that might be found in pet waste.

### Assessing your risks

Complete the risk assessment table on page 2 to determine the water pollution risks from your pets' wastes. For each category, choose the set of practices that best fits your situation. Then, at the bottom of page 2, develop an action plan to minimize water pollution hazard.

**Risk Assessment Table for Pet Waste Management**

	<b>Low risk</b>	<b>Moderate risk</b>	<b>High risk</b>	<b>Your risk</b>
<b>Cleaning up after my pet</b>	Pet lives inside or in fenced yard; <i>and</i> I always clean up after my pet in public areas	I clean up after my pet in public areas most of the time	I seldom clean up after my pet in public areas	<input type="checkbox"/> low <input type="checkbox"/> moderate <input type="checkbox"/> high
<b>Waste disposal</b>	Pet wastes are flushed down the toilet; <i>or</i> buried away from gardens, wells, ditches, and areas where children play; <i>or</i> wrapped and placed in the garbage for disposal	Pet wastes are left to decompose on grass or soil. Wastes are scattered over a wide area	Pet wastes are left on paved surfaces, concentrated in the pen or yard areas, or dumped down a storm drain or into a ditch	<input type="checkbox"/> low <input type="checkbox"/> moderate <input type="checkbox"/> high

**Your action plan**

Now that you have assessed your management practices, you can take action to change practices that may be causing water pollution. For areas that you identified as high or moderate risk, decide what action you need to take and fill out the Action Plan below.

<b>Write down all your moderate-risk and high-risk activities below</b>	<b>What can you do to reduce the potential risk for water pollution?</b>	<b>Set a target date for action</b>
<i>Samples of action items:</i>  <i>Pet wastes are left on the sidewalk and in the driveway</i>	<i>Collect and bury the wastes in an appropriate location</i>	<i>Next time wastes are deposited</i>



This HAPPI document was adapted by Michael Robotham, Carl Evensen, and Linda J. Cox from *Pet waste and water quality*, by Jennifer Hill and Carolyn Johnson, University of Wisconsin Extension Publication GWO006 and includes information from *Stormwater management* by Carl DuPoldt and Carolyn Johnson, Chapter 2, pp. 15–22 in *Home•A•Syst: An environmental risk assessment guide for the home* developed by the National Farm•A•Syst/Home•A•Syst Program. Permission to use these materials was granted by the National Farm•A•Syst/Home•A•Syst Office. HAPPI-Home materials are produced by the Hawaii's Pollution Prevention Information (HAPPI) project (Farm•A•Syst/Home•A•Syst for Hawaii) of the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (UH-CTAHR) and the USDA Cooperative Extension Service (USDA-CES). Funding for the program is provided by a U.S. EPA 319(h) grant administered by the Hawaii State Department of Health.