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Pet waste a threat to humans



SEARCH

By Suzanne Sargent July 6, 2012 12:00 am

It is a subject rarely discussed...dog poop. Can you remember the last time you ever held this type of conversation with a member of your family or neighbor? I have become increasingly interested in this subject this past year, as I have seen first-hand people not picking up after their dog at parks and on the street. I am at a loss because there are doggie bags frequently seen throughout the city. As I speak with others in my neighborhood, I know it is a problem. People are frustrated with others not being responsible and leaving unattractive waste near where they live.

In 1999, a survey by the Center for Watershed Production found that of the 41 percent of respondents who rarely or never clean up after their dog, 44 percent would refuse to do so in the face of fines and neighbor complaints. The reasons they gave were "because it eventually goes away," and "just because." Wow. I remain dumbfounded when reading these statistics and reasons. I wonder if they would say these same things if it was their son or daughter who went potty on the floor or outside. I doubt it.

Cotati city municipal code 7.24.60 states no owner or person who has control over a dog or animal, except those who are disabled, shall allow any animal to do the following:

1. An animal must not defecate on any private property other than that of its owner without the consent of the owner.
2. An animal must not defecate on any street or other public property without immediately removing their dog's waste and putting it in a doggie bag or receptacle.

You may view these Cotati codes as well as many others at www.codepublishing.com/CA/Cotati/. Although these codes are not enforced, there is a reason why they are on the books. Dog waste not cleaned up is a danger not only to you, but others.

Disease is one of the most important reasons why you should pick up after your pet. This includes roundworms and parvovirus. Roundworms are common worm parasites that infect dogs. They live in the stomach and intestine of a host and shed their eggs into the environment through the host's feces. Next time you are tempted to leave your dog's droppings on the lawn or trail, please consider uncollected dog waste spreads disease and attracts rodents who feed on pet waste. Dogs that come into contact with feces can also get the deadly virus. Body fluids including urine, saliva and vomit can spread it.

Once this pathogen gets in the soil, it can remain active for months and freezing temperatures do not kill it. Parvovirus survives best in shady, cool, moist areas so the dirt near trees, bushes or playground equipment is a favored spot for this virus. If a child or dog ingests contaminated soil or sand, infection can occur.

Many people associate dog waste with fertilizer, which does its part in nature. Unfortunately, this is not true and is very dangerous. When it rains, feces left on trails, sidewalks or yards can wash into untreated rivers and lakes. In just one 24-hour period, parasite eggs can develop on dog waste. These parasites become infectious as the feces ages. Roundworm can develop in approximately three weeks and can remain infectious for years in contaminated soil and water. A recent CDC study showed that 14 percent of Americans tested positive for roundworms.

So what can be done to protect the public from parasite feces? The most effective way is to use peer pressure. There are several ways which people use to deal with this situation, although not always successfully. Do you engage the person and does the conversation become heated? Do you avoid your neighbor due to dog pick up issues? You will most likely find that arguing with the person is the least effective way in taking care of the problem.

Instead, simply say, "Did you forget a bag to pick up after your dog? Here, have one of mine." When you leave the house with Fido, make sure you have several bags in case you see someone in violation. Most likely, the person will accept the bag and pick up. There is also a very good chance you will have a positive conversation and talk about your canine friends.

Suzanne Sargent is a Cotati resident and a dog lover, who has developed an interest in dog-related issues in her community, including diseases which can occur due to lack of dog waste pick-up. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology.

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