

Community Mutt Mitt Program

“One small step for dog owners, one giant leap for our waterways”

PROBLEM – Pet waste spreads disease and pollutes waterways

Many people do not make the connection between pet waste, health, and water pollution. Survey results indicate that only 1/3 of Kitsap Peninsula residents think pet waste significantly contributes to water pollution – the same number who admit to leaving it on the ground, at least some of the time. Though the problem may seem minor, estimates indicate that dogs in Kitsap County create over 11 tons of waste each day. This daily volume is equivalent to the waste generated by a city of more than 17,000 people. Roundworms, E. coli, and Giardia are just a few of the harmful organisms that can spread from dog waste to people and other pets. Some of these pathogens can live for weeks in streams or soil, waiting for a host. Pet waste is also a common source of the fecal coliform bacteria contaminating local streams and shorelines.

SOLUTION – Community Mutt Mitt Program

All over Kitsap County, Mutt Mitt stations are cropping up. Pet waste bags are found around neighborhoods, apartment buildings, walking trails, and beaches. The proliferation of these stations is the product of a unique partnership between Kitsap County Surface and Stormwater Management Program, Kitsap County Health District, local cities, and community members. The Mutt Mitt Program exemplifies how a relatively small public investment can inspire citizens to enhance the safety and enjoyment of their communities.

The Mutt Mitt Program improves pet waste management in public places and makes picking up pet waste the “norm” rather than the exception. Interested community groups receive a dispenser, signage, and a startup supply of bags. In exchange, they install and maintain the equipment, including purchasing replacement bags. The stations make cleaning up easy and convenient, they remind dog owners of their responsibility, and inform them about proper disposal.

RESPONSE – The community loves this program

Since the program started in 2004, 140 Mutt Mitt stations have been provided to community groups. As shown in the graph, the response has grown steadily with increasing awareness of the program. Sixty-five dispensers were distributed in 2009 alone. The startup supply of bags provided by the program accounted for only 1/3 of the 103,000 bags that were actually used by the community in that year. This equates to about 33,897 pounds of dog waste diverted from surface waters as a result of the Mutt Mitt Program during 2009 alone.

Feedback from the community regarding the program is overwhelmingly positive. A letter from an elementary school assistant stated that pet waste problems on their playground negatively impact student learning. However, the problem went away after the Mutt Mitt station was installed. Community members consistently find this program to be an effective solution to their pet waste problems.

COST BENEFIT – A win-win for the community and the sponsoring agencies

The value of this program to the community and the sponsoring agencies exceeds the investment. The initial cost of supplies and advertising for one station equal about \$330. Assuming that the station will last about a decade and will dispense around 500 bags annually, the cost to the sponsoring agencies would be 6¢ per bag. Community groups only pay for \$15 of installation materials and future replacement bags at a cost of 3¢ per bag. The combined investment of less than 10¢ for each used bag represents a waste pile diverted from surface waters. Preventing bacteria from entering our waterways is significantly less expensive than costly studies and extensive cleanup efforts.



Photo by Jesse Beals

