

## Follow-Up to Canine Considerations

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[Canine Considerations](#), appearing in the previous edition, encouraged dog owners to clean up after their pups and obey the leash law. Let's take a look at some of the recent canine-related comments, questions, and observations.

We have folks bagging their dog waste while on walks, which is great. However, neighbors posted on a community Facebook page that bags of poop were thrown into their empty, curbside trash bin. Years earlier, all one needed to say was, "Pick up after your dog," and that placing the bag in a trash can was understood. These days, bags of dog waste wrongly wind up in storm drains, left on front yards, or chucked into natural areas. Therefore, adding the trash can as an appropriate destination for the bag was necessary. To further clarify, kindly pick up dog waste with a plastic bag and deposit that bag in your home garbage or, when walking in the park, use any of the County's garbage cans instead of your neighbor's. Before depositing the waste bag, you win extra points if you pick up other rubbish along the way—anything from bits of Weed Whacker line and candy wrappers (both of which can be ingested by wildlife with lethal consequences) to nails on the road to water bottles and, yes, even the pet poop inconsiderate owners left behind. I do so and several neighbors seeing my haul have even offered to dispose of my bag. Here is a great motto to adopt when dog walking: "We pick up more than only after ourselves."

In a recent e-mail correspondence, a neighbor near Accotink Creek shared these observations after partaking in watershed training:

I was concerned with all of the pollution in Accotink Creek and Lake Accotink and wanted to do something about it. Additionally, an alarming number of young dogs in our neighborhood have lost their battle with cancer in a short period of time. Searching the Internet for potential causes led me back to "their environment." Drinking water from Accotink Creek, licking their paws after walking next to the creek and down sidewalks covered with chemical lawn fertilizer/pesticides applied to lawns. I also have a pond my dog drinks out of and thought of pesticides getting into that water poisoning him and the fish, birds, frogs, snakes, chipmunks.... What could I do to mitigate my dog's chances of being exposed to a carcinogen?

Knowing how the watershed is all connected and how residential run off into storm drains affects water quality, has inspired me to make the switch from chemical lawn products... to organic fertilizer, cut my lawn on the highest setting, mulch all grass clippings back into the lawn and I have installed rain barrels on all of my downspouts and use the water to water my plants and garden. These are some small changes I have made to reduce my impact on the watershed and improve the environment on my own property and the runoff to the creek, lake, river, bay, ocean.

First, kudos to this neighbor for becoming a better land steward! Folks from different neighborhoods have made similar observations associating synthetic lawn treatments with pet incidences of cancer, neurological diseases, and/or severe allergic reactions.\* Even stand-alone fertilizers often contain irritating salts. At the very least, families should consider keeping synthetic lawn treatments out of yards where children and pets play and off of impervious surfaces. We can hope that "lawn doping" will be viewed in the same, critical light as sports doping, especially since the former harms more than just the user. Just like an athlete can choose a healthy fitness program over banned drugs and steroids, home owners and lawn professionals can opt for vibrant yards through sustainable land management. That day might be soon upon us as priorities shift; for example, within a decade, Californians under a severe drought are replacing traditional lawns with attractive xeriscaping and native plants, using the motto, "Brown is the new green." Those not complying receive anything from peer shaming to fines.

Until more people here in Northern Virginia implement healthier landscaping practices, the following are some recommendations to help mitigate the repercussions from synthetic lawn chemicals to dogs during and after each walk:

- Keep your dog(s) on a 6-foot leash at all times.
- Never permit them swim in or drink from any natural water bodies, including streams, ponds, and

puddles. Let pets drink only from water bowls, preferably using filtered water. Even without the lawn chemicals, leaking petroleum products, and other human pollution, you never know when feces or a dead, rotting animal is contaminating the water upstream.

- If a neighbor has applied lawn chemicals, keep the dog on a tight leash while you pass that house. Restrict the dog to the sidewalk. If the sidewalk is contaminated with lawn chemicals, walk in the street if possible. Keep this practice up until the next good rain. Commercial applicators' "stay off" signs are often posted for an arbitrary period (e.g., without precipitation or irrigation, granular products are as potent 24 hours after treatment as when first spread).
- Prevent your pooch from picking up and eating anything on the walk. For example, a massive worm die-off all over the sidewalk in front of a neighbor's yard might be due to overabundant pesticide use or misapplication. Those dead worms could still carry concentrated poisons.
- No matter how much you try to keep your canine companion's nose clean, he or she is bound to stick it somewhere nasty. Once home, use a damp paper towel to gently wipe the dog's snout.
- Use a small bucket filled with approximately two inches of warm water to rinse each paw. Dry them immediately with an old towel. Grab a fresh bucket of water with each dog if you have more than one. These steps are usually done on muddy days anyway. Definitely wash paws when de-icing salts covers the streets. Washing paws year-round regardless of weather conditions also helps address lawn chemicals contaminating and irritating the paws, then getting licked up by the pooch.
- Doggie booties help protect paws, but some pups never get used to them.
- Go totally organic and encourage your neighbors to do so, too. Amend the soil with natural ingredients such as seaweed and fish-based fertilizers, compost (saving your autumn leaves and grass clippings), manure, and lime. Hand-pull weeds or limit their germination with corn gluten-based products. Apply milky spore or nematodes to control insect infestations. Many on-line and local brick-and-mortar companies carry numerous good, pet-safe products.

\*From my research and fieldwork during my employment in a toxicology laboratory, I saw how both some of the active and "inert" lawn chemical ingredients can be pretty hazardous. Many reports cited fish and bird kills on golf courses. Chemical cause and effect is a complicated discipline that marries toxicology (the study of how harmful chemicals interact with organisms) and epidemiology (investigating how harmful substances and disease spread within a population). In an uncontrolled environment (i.e., real world situations, outside of a laboratory setting), countless factors are at play which can be neutral, offset the toxin with health benefits, or amplify the given chemical's harmful effects. With humans, OSHA requires health records to be stored throughout an employee's tenure plus 30 additional years following a chemical exposure incident.

Some excellent reading material is here:

Hans-Olov Adami et al. August 2011. Toxicology and epidemiology: improving the science with a framework for combining toxicological and epidemiological evidence to establish causal inference.

*Toxicological Sciences* 122(2): 223–234. <http://toxsci.oxfordjournals.org/content/122/2/223.full>

Jenkings, McKay. 2016. The dark side of the American lawn.

<http://portfolios.aiga.org/gallery/34690087/The-Dark-Side-of-the-American-Lawn>. From the book, *ContamiNation: My Quest to Survive in a Toxic World*. Avery, New York, NY. pp. 336.

Mid-America Regional Council. Use Lawn Chemicals Wisely [brochure]

[https://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/marc\\_lawnchemicals.pdf](https://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/marc_lawnchemicals.pdf)

Schramski, Paul and Sanford Lewis. July 2008. *The Truth About Cats, Dogs & Lawn Chemicals*. Pesticide Watch Education Fund

[http://www.pesticidewatch.org/sites/default/files/pets\\_guide\\_draft\\_final.pdf](http://www.pesticidewatch.org/sites/default/files/pets_guide_draft_final.pdf)

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). 2001. Access to Medical and Exposure Records <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3110.pdf>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website on pesticides: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticides>

U.S. EPA. April 12, 2016. Pesticide Worker Safety website: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-worker-safety/restricted-use-products-rup-report>

U.S. EPA. January 19, 2016. Restricted Use Product Summary Report

<https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-02/documents/rupreport-sec3-update-jan2016.pdf>

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