

Cleaning up the **Act**



Dealing with
the problem of
dog fouling

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Dealing with the problem of dog fouling

DOG MESS is dirty, unpleasant, a potential risk to health and quite rightly it concerns most of us wherever we live.

For many UNISON members, it also seriously affects the conditions under which they work. This is why UNISON has joined with the Tidy Britain Group to call for more action to clean up dog fouling in public places. We aim to:

- ✓ Increase and reinforce awareness of the problem.
- ✓ Promote responsible dog ownership.
- ✓ Encourage local authorities to tackle dog fouling.
- ✓ Help assess the risks and describe risk prevention for workers who come into contact with dog fouling and associated problems.

- ✓ Inform about the health hazard of dog faeces.
- ✓ Promote the new Dogs (Fouling of Land Act) 1996 which simplifies and increases the scope for local authority action on dog fouling in England and Wales.
- ✓ Enforce the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 and Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.
- ✓ Advise on the availability of existing best practice in anti-dog fouling measures.
- ✓ Suggest ways of community involvement in solutions to dog fouling.

We do not wish to see dogs, or their owners, penalised, but we do want to see local authorities working with the public and their employees to create workable solutions to the hazard of dog fouling.

The size of the problem

About 5.5 million people in Britain today own dogs. For many, they are essential companions which bring enjoyment, company and security. There are clearly many positive aspects to dog ownership and dog owners are as entitled as anyone to exercise and enjoy their dogs in public places.

What brings dog owners into conflict with other users of public space is their unwillingness to clean up after their pets.

✗ There is an estimated 900 tonnes of dog faeces produced every day.

✗ Department of the Environment research indicates that half of all owners, and men in particular, never clean up their dog's faeces. 90% said they would do so if only there were not so embarrassed.

Cleanliness standards surveys by the Tidy Britain Group have found that:

✗ of 47 local authority areas surveyed in 1993: one in six sites had fouling present and one in three open



space sites were fouled.

✗ Fouling was present on 22% of London borough street sites and 25% of London parks visited in 1995.

✗ In a city survey conducted in 1996, seven per cent of street sites were found to be fouled.

These levels of fouling show the owners' distaste

towards cleaning up after their dogs. The message to them must be that it is simply no longer acceptable to leave their dogs' faeces in public places.

Responsible dog owners

Encouraging changes in public behaviour and attitudes is a complex and lengthy business. Who would have thought twenty years ago that most buildings and workplaces, both public and private, would now have implemented no smoking policies. This has been achieved largely via consensus between smokers and non-smokers. In order to succeed, anti-dog fouling policies must achieve that same level of agreement between dog owners and non-owners.

Key messages for dog owners:

- Responsible dog owners improve the amenity at parks and open spaces for all users. They also help to promote dog ownership generally.
- Dogs fouling school playing fields and other areas where children play can cause a severe health risk.
- Always clean after your dog. Many local authorities provide free poop scoops, waste bags and dog waste bins. Dog faeces can also be deposited in litter bins or household bins if wrapped.
- It is simply no longer socially acceptable to allow your dog to foul public spaces.
- Worming dogs regularly can reduce the risk of toxocara being spread to people.

Responsible employers

Local authorities are responsible for the health and safety of their constituents and their employees. Dog fouling is top of the list of complaints in councillors' post bags. Tidy Britain Group surveys show that 70% of authorities already have a responsible dog ownership campaign, and 61% provide bins for dog faeces in parks. It is time that all local authorities followed the lead of those councils who are already committed to tackling the problem of fouling.



Branches should insist that:

- ✓ the new legislation in the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 be adopted in England and Wales and adequate resources given to its implementation and enforcement. Local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales already have a duty under the Litter (Animal Droppings) Order 1991 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990 section 89 (1) and (2) to keep public places clear of dog fouling as far as is practicable. There is a duty to keep land and roads clear of dog fouling in Northern Ireland under the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994.
- ✓ The health and safety risks to staff and the public are addressed and that the health and safety legislation is complied with.
- ✓ The authority adopt an overall programme of health education for the public to increase awareness of the risks and to promote responsible dog ownership.

Occupational health and safety

PROTECTING the health and safety of UNISON members who come into contact with dog fouling or who enforce legislation on dog fouling is vital.

Risk assessment

UK health and safety law is now based on the concept of risk assessment and control.

To fully protect these staff, the employer must undertake a risk assessment as required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992, these cover violence, and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 (COSHH) which cover infectious agents. Risk assessment need not be a complex process, but it must be systematic if it is to achieve the aims of identifying:

- ✓ the extent and nature of the risk,
- ✓ the factors which contribute to the risk,
- ✓ changes necessary to eliminate or control the risk.

The risk assessment should be monitored and reviewed regularly, and particularly as and when circumstances change. Employers are required to provide safety representatives with copies of the results of their risk assessments. These should be requested for dog fouling hazards, particularly if the employer is suspected of not having carried out the risk assessment.

Risks

The main risks are:

- Violence towards enforcement officers, e.g. dog wardens
 - this includes verbal abuse and threats as well as physical harm.
- Microbiological
 - toxocariasis (see section on toxocara, p4),
 - campylobacter/salmonella (dogs, like humans, get infections and can pass them on),
 - pathogenic organisms could contaminate wounds or broken skin.

Risk prevention

Ideally the risk should be eliminated via the mechanical disposal of dog faeces, i.e. by specially designed removal equipment; otherwise



consideration must be given to:

- ✓ Personal protection: protective clothing, cartridge filter mask with eye protection, gloves, shovel/long handled poop scoop, hoop to hold refuse sack open, facilities for washing hands.
- ✓ Information: adequate information, instruction and training must be given to staff to ensure they are aware of the risks and of the precautions they must take to reduce those risks.
- ✓ Hygiene facilities: adequate provision should be made to allow staff good personal hygiene. Designated hand wash basins with non-hand operated taps, bactericides, soaps and paper towels should be available, with changing rooms and

ideally showers. Food and drink should be prohibited in the areas of risk. Clothing that had been worn whilst working should not be worn in areas where food is prepared or consumed. Overalls should be washed separately in hot water by the employer not the employee.

- ✓ Bags containing dog faeces should meet the same specification as those used to transport clinical waste.
- ✓ Enforcement officers should receive training in recognising and handling potentially violent situations. There should be a reporting system for

violent incidents.

- ✓ The employer should have a written policy on the prevention of violence towards staff.
- ✓ Enforcement officers also require full training in the law relating to dog ownership and the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act. Instruction in report writing for criminal evidence is essential.

The National Dog Wardens' Association runs courses which cover the requirements for dog wardens/enforcement officers.

Toxocariasis: the risks

What is toxocariasis?

TOXOCARIASIS is a disease caused by the eggs of the roundworm toxocara which can be passed from dogs to humans through contact with the animal faeces and contaminated soil. Children are particularly at risk and infection can lead to serious illness and even permanent loss of sight. This is an entirely preventable health risk and the main reason that dog owners should clean up after their pets.

How is it caught?

Infection is only through accidental swallowing of the toxocara eggs.

Freshly deposited faeces are not a danger because the toxocara eggs do not become infective until they have embryonated. This takes 2-3 weeks in warm, moist conditions and longer in cooler conditions. Once embryonated the microscopic egg will remain infective for at least two years. The unseen eggs remain where dogs carrying the toxocara roundworm have defecated long after the faeces have disappeared. Around one million microscopic eggs are present per infected dog deposit. Puppies and nursing bitches are ten times more likely to be shedding toxocara eggs than older dogs.

Children, especially toddlers, are at more risk from infection because they play on the ground and are more likely to put fingers and toys in their mouths.

Symptoms

Once swallowed, the eggs hatch into larvae in the intestines and burrow out through the body. Depending upon the route taken by the larvae, the

symptoms of toxocariasis can vary from general malaise, dizziness, bronchitis and headache, to serious cases such as asthma, epilepsy and sight impairment. The illness lasts for years and is very difficult to treat.

Total blindness from toxocariasis is very rare. Public Health Laboratory Service Figures for June 1994 indicate that approximately 50 cases of toxocara eye disease are diagnosed each year, largely affecting children and ranging from sight impairment to complete loss of vision. The rarity of cases does not lessen the fact that any sight impairment is incredibly distressing to sufferers and their families. One case of blindness due to toxocariasis is one case too many and an appalling tragedy since toxocariasis is wholly preventable.

Prevention

- ✓ Dog owners should always clean up after their pets.
- ✓ Children should not mix play on the ground with eating finger food.
- ✓ Health promotion work on toxocara is vital in schools, both primary and secondary; and with dog owners to increase awareness and encourage responsibility.
- ✓ Good general personal hygiene is essential, especially hand washing before meals.
- ✓ Regular worming of cats and dogs is absolutely necessary, particularly for unwormed pregnant bitches pre-whelping and the pups after birth.

Further Information

Community Hygiene Concern is a project funded by the Department of Health. It provides detailed advice and information on toxocariasis both to the public

and to local authorities and health care professionals. Its address and telephone help line can be found under the useful contacts heading. Please note that

written enquiries for information must be accompanied by three 2nd class stamps and a self-addressed label.

Legislation on dog fouling



Designation

THE DOGS (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 will supersede existing dog fouling bye-laws in England and Wales. It creates a new offence of failing to immediately remove dog faeces from designated land.

Councils which adopt the Act are able to designate specific areas in which it will have force. They will **not** be able to designate:

- carriageways with a speed limit of over 40 mph, and land running alongside them,
- land used for agriculture or woodland,
- land which is predominantly marshland, moor or heath,
- rural common land.

Councils can, however, designate any other land open to the air to which the public are entitled to have access. This includes land owned by parish or county councils and privately owned land.

The offence

An offence is committed if an owner fails to clean up their dog's faeces from designated land. The

offence cannot be committed if the person in charge of the dog puts the faeces in a bin on the land. Being unaware of, or unequipped to, clean up fouling is not a reasonable excuse under the new law.

Penalty

The maximum fine for someone who fails to remove their dog's faeces is £1,000. However, a fixed penalty scheme is available with a fine of £25. The issuing of fixed penalty tickets can be delegated from council staff to others, such as contract staff or parish members.

Under the provisions of the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, it is an offence to allow the deposit and leaving of dog faeces on land open to air which is accessible to the public. The fine is £500. There is also the availability of a fixed penalty notice of £10. Authorised officers can demand the name and address of an offender and if the details are not

given then that is a further offence. Byelaws to control fouling are also still in existence.

In Scotland, the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 makes dog fouling an offence on footpaths and grass verges plus local authority maintained pedestrian precincts, children's play areas and recreation grounds with a fine of £500.

Management Rules can also be adopted by local authorities in designated areas such as parks. The

legislation is enforced by the police and local authority staff.

Timetable

Existing district council bye-laws will cease to have effect on land which has been designated. In any case, all district council dog fouling bye-laws will cease to have effect 10 years from the date of the Act, i.e. August 2006.

Best practice: combatting dog fouling

THERE ARE many local authorities which, despite the difficulties of enforcement, are leading the way on anti-dog fouling initiatives. For example:

South Staffordshire District Council with Penkrige Parish Council

Before any action was taken, a survey of the levels of dog fouling in the village was carried out, in order to allow measurement of success.

This pilot scheme was used to assess what action worked and could then be used in other areas. Bins were installed on the most heavily fouled areas along with the distribution of leaflets, posters and poop scoops. A Good Dog Fun Day was held at the village fair. There were press releases using a dog mascot, Mindy, who had been rescued by the dog warden, after a serious roadside injury.

The success of the scheme was shown with a 70% reduction in fouling in a 3 month period. The authority now intends to extend the concept to other areas. The best publicity was felt to be through the posters and from personal persuasion of dog owners to each other.

Wycombe District Council with Downley Parish Council

The dog wardens chose this parish as having a problem with dog fouling and a pilot scheme using free poop scoops was trialled.

Leaflets and poop scoops were included in the local free paper which was delivered to every household.

The poop scoops would provide a non-confrontational way for non dog owners to approach dog owners and serve as a reminder of the need to clear up.

A follow-up telephone

survey found that the majority of residents thought it a worthwhile exercise which was cost effective and non dog owners would pass the scoops on. The campaign reduced the levels of fouling and improved relationships between the dog wardens and residents.

Weymouth and Portland Borough Council

A neighbourhood dog watch scheme was introduced in 1993 in response to complaints about dog fouling. It was called FIDO or Fine Idle Dog Owners.

A leaflet was provided explaining the byelaws, advice on how to gather evidence against offenders and how to safely approach dog owners. Stickers were displayed on lamp posts.

The scheme acted as a deterrent to dog owners and has allowed residents to take an active part in reducing fouling in their area. Unfortunately some owners have chosen to change areas rather than clear up. The authority would like to extend the scheme from the existing 10 areas to get greater coverage.

Ryedale District Council

As a Spring Clean Week initiative, members of Norton Watch, a junior arm of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, were involved in planting shrubs as part of their clean up campaign.

The children highlighted the dog fouling problem during the planting around a grassed area of St Nicholas Street car park, Norton, an area to which the council's poop scoop's bye-laws did not apply.

The Watch Group asked the council what they could do about it so the council installed a dog waste bin with a brass plaque on it advising "PLEASE CLEAN UP AFTER YOUR DOG - PROVIDED BY NORTON WATCH GROUP AND RYEDALE DISTRICT COUNCIL".

The installation of the bin was given media publicity by a photocall with the council's dog warden, Chairman of the Council, children of Norton Watch Group and incidentally a stray golden retriever which was impounded during the photocall. The photocall was also used to publicise our leaflet - "Your Dog and the Law".

Dog fouling – keeping an eye on the problem

Following extensive media publicity concerning a leaflet highlighting the dangers of dog fouling in relation to toxocariasis, the council was approached by an ophthalmic nurse who was studying for a Diploma in Health Education.

As part of her project on toxocariasis, she was aware of the council's involvement in dog fouling issues. To highlight the problem of fouling around a local lake, where the council had a poop scoop byelaw and provided six dog waste bins, she had obtained sponsorship through neighbours to collect dog waste. Rather than see this as a failure of the council to keep the lakeside clear of dog waste, the council worked with her to highlight and hopefully embarrass the less responsible dog owners to clean up after their dogs and use the waste bin facilities provided.

A press release was issued by the council and photocall arranged. In one hour's collection, 236 separate deposits weighing 44 lbs were collected and she obtained £88 sponsorship for the RSPCA. Positive publicity on the serious problem of dog fouling on a recreational area was obtained.

Parish initiatives

Publicity on dog fouling has been arranged with several parish councils which are covered by poop scoop byelaws and those who opted out of adopting the byelaws. A letter and various publicity brochures provided by the council are provided for the parishes, which arrange for distribution.

Partnerships

Royal Mail: A partnership was agreed with the Royal Mail in an attempt to reduce the number of dog attacks on post personnel. Dangerous or aggressive dogs were notified to the dog warden service which visited the dog's owner and wrote to them to advise



them of their legal obligations. Although the original intention was not to involve the dog warden service in legal work, in 1996 three control orders were obtained in the magistrate's court in cases where personnel were bitten and two official cautions issued. These cases have involved the service in a considerable amount of work but have benefits to the wider community e.g. neighbours, refuse collectors etc. The authority has also given Northern Electric advice regarding the problems their meter readers often encounter with dogs.

Ryedale Voluntary Action: The dog warden service has been involved in the setting up of a scheme whereby dogs of elderly and infirm people can be exercised by volunteers or be looked after on a short term period should the owner be suddenly taken into hospital.

Dog Wardens: Along with UNISON, both the Tidy Britain Group and the National Playing Fields Association endorse the value and importance of dog wardens. Where authorities employ sufficient wardens and give high priority to their role, especially in education, concerns about dogs in the community can be reduced.

Useful publications and contacts

“Picking up the problem”

THE TIDY BRITAIN Group is keen to support and promote local action to reduce levels of dog fouling in public places. It has produced an extensive guide to best practice in this field: “Picking up the Problem: A positive approach to dog fouling”. This contains case studies of good practice throughout the country with fact sheets on:

- responsible dog-ownership,
- successful enforcement/prosecution,
- claiming costs in legal action,
- high profile campaigns,
- education in schools,
- clean up machinery,
- importance of dog wardens.

The guide is a priced publication available from Tidy Britain Group Head Office. The Group also produces a free leaflet “Dog Fouling and the Law”.

“Taking the Lead”

The National Playing Fields Association publishes a comprehensive guide to ways in which dog owners, children and sports people can share recreational areas, by providing dedicated space for each user group.

“Taking the Lead” is a priced publication. Details are available from the Association.

UNISON publications

- Guide to Risk Assessment – stock no. 1351
- Personal Protective Equipment at Work – stock no. 922
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment – stock no. 921

Available **free** to members from UNISON Communications, Civic House, 20 Grand Depot Road, London SE18 6SF (Tel: 0181 854 2244). Please send in your written orders quoting the relevant stock numbers for speedy despatch.

Health & Safety publications

General COSHH Approved Code of Practice – Ref: ISBN 0 7176 08190

COSHH and Peripatetic Workers – Ref: ISBN 0 1188 57339

Available as **priced** publications from HSE Books, Baynards House, 1 Chepstow Place, London W2 4TF. (Tel: 0171 221 0870).

Useful contacts

- ✓ Tidy Britain Group,
Head Office,
The Pier,
Wigan, Lancs WN3 4EX.
Tel: 01942 824620
- ✓ National Playing Fields Association,
25 Ovington Square,
London SW3 1LQ.
Tel: 0171 584 6445
- ✓ National Dog Wardens Association,
Council Offices,
Gloucester Road,
Tewkesbury GL20 5TT.
Tel: 01684 295010
- ✓ Community Hygiene Concern,
160 Inderwick Road,
London N8 9JT.
Tel: 0181 341 7167
- ✓ Community Hygiene Resource Project
Hospital for Tropical Diseases,
4 St Pancras Way,
London NW1 0PE
Tel: 0171 387 1990
Mon-Fri: 10.30-2.30pm.

Cleaning up the Act

**Dog fouling
can cause
toxocariasis**

Local authorities can prevent the spread of this disease by:

- enforcing the legislation effectively
- promoting and providing facilities for dog owners – poop scoops and dog waste bins
- promoting public health education
- clearing public places of dog mess.

**Toxocariasis
is a serious
public
health risk**

Local authorities can protect staff by:

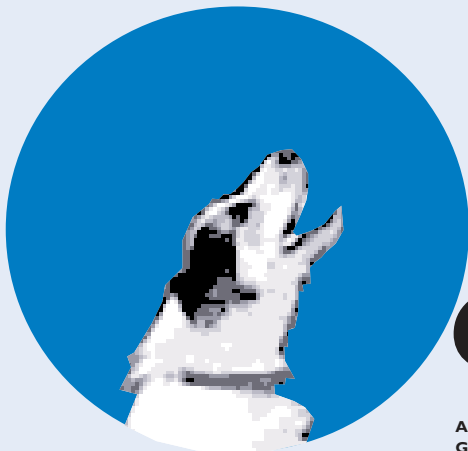
- providing protective clothing and hygiene facilities for staff
- providing information and training to staff
- providing for the mechanical disposal of dog faeces
- ensuring bags containing dog faeces meet the same specifications as clinical waste bags

**Toxocariasis
can lead to
illness and
blindness**

- training enforcement officers in recognising and dealing with potentially violent situations
- establishing a written policy on the prevention of violence towards staff
- full training for enforcement officers on the law relating to dog ownership.

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