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After a request from a member of Ecops I have compiled some information that you may find interesting about dogs and the laws surrounding them.

Britain is well known for being a nation of dog-lovers. Dogs have had a role in society for centuries. Dogs can be workers or faithful family pets, and throughout history they have been loyal companions to the British Monarchy.

All dogs, whether they are 'by Royal Appointment' or just hapless hounds, have something in common that makes them the scourge of the human race: they produce dog poo.

However, it is unfair to blame the canine population; it is the responsibility of the dog owner to ensure that the dog's mess is cleaned up. Although there are a great number of owners that do clear it up, there are still some people who feel it is unhygienic. However, it is even more of a health hazard to leave it where it lies - on pavements, in parks and playgrounds, or even on the beach. It is also against the law.

#### Man's Best Friend

There are around 24 million UK households and, in 2002, the number of households owning dogs was 4.8 million.

21% of households with dogs have more than one.

The highest levels of dog ownership are among the 45 to 54 year-old age group - around 30%.

There are around 6.8 million dogs in the UK.

It is estimated that the dog population of the UK produces 900 tonnes of faeces every day.

Over a ten-year lifetime, a dog can produce up to half a ton of faeces.

#### The Law

Dog fouling is covered by several legislations:

The Dog (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 in England and Wales.

The Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003 .

Litter (Animal Droppings) Order 1991 - Made under section 84 (14) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990

Statutory Instruments Nos 2762 and 2763

DoE Circular No 18/96 (Welsh Office No 54/96)

These Acts require the owner to clear up immediately after his or her dog, should it foul 'designated land'. Individual local authorities use them as a basis to create bylaws (which allow for instant fixed-penalty fines) and nominate the designated areas in the appropriate borough. The fines start at around £40, rising to £1,000 - the maximum amount that can be issued in a courtroom.

Designated areas are usually places where dog faeces is likely to cause a health hazard to people. These include children's play parks, public greens and parks, residential areas, cycle paths and walkways to name a few. Some borough councils employ dog wardens to patrol these areas and catch irresponsible dog owners failing to clean up.

#### Health Risks

All faeces contains bacteria that can cause stomach upsets if ingested.

However, the greatest risk to public health from dog faeces is toxocariasis.

### Toxocariasis

Toxocariasis is an infection of the round worm *Toxocara canis*<sup>5</sup>. It is a zoonotic<sup>6</sup> disease that is spread via unwashed vegetables and dog faeces. Young children in particular are at risk due to their weaker immune systems and because they are more likely to expose themselves by ingesting the eggs. A puppy can pass as many as 15,000 eggs per gram of faeces, and they are a major source of environmental contamination.

Each *T. canis* female can lay up to 700 eggs a day. These are passed out when the dog defecates and can survive for up to three years in soil. After two to three weeks of warm weather the eggs develop into an embryo state, containing larva - this is when they become infective to dogs and people. The larvae try to migrate through the human body as they would in a dog's, but the human body treats them as foreign material, which causes a reaction and tissue damage.

There are two types of toxocariasis: visceral larva migrans (VLM) and ocular larva migrans (OLM).

In VLM, the larvae reach the liver, causing inflammation and symptoms such as abdominal pain and pyrexia. Most people recover spontaneously.

OLM occurs when a migrating larva reaches the eye. It causes a granuloma to form on the retina, causing significant visual impairment and in severe cases even blindness.

There are about 12 new cases of OLM diagnosed annually in the UK<sup>7</sup>.

### Reduce The Risk

Poop scoop every time your dog makes a mess. Keep a packet of bags next to the dog's lead as a reminder to take them with you.

Dogs should be wormed regularly - every three to six months. Use a prescription wormer from a veterinary surgeon.

Exercise dogs in dedicated 'dog areas' of parks if available.

Do not take dogs into parks that have children's playgrounds.

Contact the local authority and ask for a poop bin to be put in place.

#### Bag It And Bin It

The 'poop scoop' is a very simple plastic claw device that is used in conjunction with 'poop bags'.

A poop bag is very similar to a nappy sack. It is a small plastic bag with two handles at the top. A knot can be tied in the handles to seal them closed.

The bottom of the bag is placed so it is sitting in the 'claw' and the top of the bag is folded over the outside of it, covering the hand. It is used to grab the faeces, and is then closed. The bag is then turned inside-out over the claw and the faeces are sealed in the bag. Neither the hand nor the poop scoop comes into contact with the faeces, providing a very hygienic way to lift dog faeces. Any small plastic bag can be used (providing it has no air-holes in it!) but most people don't even want to handle the faeces through a bag.

The filled bag is either carried home for safe disposal via the refuse bin or dog loo, or placed in one of the dedicated 'poop bins', provided by the local authority, that are situated in dog walking areas. If it is not possible to dispose of the bag at home, then it must be double-wrapped before being placed in a public litter bin.

Commercial poop bags are sold at supermarkets, veterinary clinics, pet stores and even large garden centres. Many local authorities now provide free poop bags, reflecting the importance of cleaning up after dogs.

Pregnant women and individuals with impaired immunity should take extra precautions when cleaning up the faeces by wearing disposable gloves available from chemists.

I hope this was of interest to some of you.

Many thanks

Paul