

Solutions for a Sustainable Future

Dog Waste: I have been reading lately a great deal about composting, and methane creation from waste. We have a large number of pets, with most of them being dogs. Is there any usefulness to their waste as an energy source or as a fertilizer?



Instead of thinking first about how to get rid of waste, more people are now asking how they might put parts of the waste stream to better uses. This is especially true with true with methane.

Factoid: There are 78 million dogs in the U.S. today. They eat (but doesn't Cashmere look cute doing it though). Then they eliminate a pound or more of poop every day. This adds up to a huge amount of waste. The 3.6 billion pounds of dog poop produced in a year can fill 800 hundred footballs fields, one foot deep!

The most frequently used method of getting rid of dog poop is by collecting it in a plastic bag, storing it in a garbage can for several days, then sending it to a landfill in the weekly trash pick-up. Some believe it is a "natural" fertilizer and soil nutrient and leave it on the ground where it breaks down and is absorbed into the soil.

The difference lies in the gut. Cows are herbivores and roam thousands of acres. Dogs are carnivores like us and live in small spaces where waste becomes super-concentrated. Composting dog poop and using it to fertilize your garden veggies is rolling the parasitic dice. Unless the composting temperature reaches 165 degrees and stays there for a good five days, the bacteria are not completely obliterated and are free to multiply and contaminate the food you plan to harvest and eat.

Factoid: It has been estimated that a single gram of dog waste can contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria, which are known to cause cramps, diarrhea, intestinal illness, and serious kidney disorders in humans. EPA even estimates that two or three days' worth of droppings from a population of about 100 dogs would contribute enough bacteria to temporarily close a bay, and all watershed areas within 20 miles of it, to swimming and shell fishing.

Feces transport millions of microorganisms that can harm the earth, water, flora, fauna and us. Leaving the waste to decompose and "nourish the soil" is a misguided belief. Disintegration of feces is quick, but true decomposition takes a long time and the microorganisms don't just disappear. The whole story is that as poop is slowly breaking down, it is carried off by rainwater or runoff and leaches into the water table

and sewer drains where it dumps into streams, rivers, lakes and oceans. Aquatic plant life and organisms, fish and mammals are harmed or killed by this contaminated runoff.

If you choose to bag the waste in plastic and send it to a landfill, chances are that in 500-1000 years that bag, made of high or low density polyethylene film, will still be struggling to disintegrate. In the meantime, it adds millions of tons of junk to our landfills and water supply.



A project was funded through MIT and created in partnership with the City of Cambridge. Methane, a common greenhouse gas, is created in a methane digester that converts freshly scooped poop into burnable fuel. Anywhere people are walking dogs can be a source of heat and light by installing a Methane Digester.



Unfortunately, most digester systems are costly propositions. Companies are now manufacturing and selling small digesters at affordable prices, opening the doors for experimentation and community involvement.

Factoid: Dog poop is now on the list of viable materials that can be harvested and used from the waste stream. A park was launched using dog feces to power lampposts in a park.

I am Jim Steigner (Mr. Comfort) and I just wanted you to know. As always please feel free to contact me at www.mrcomforthvac.com with any questions, thoughts or ideas. Thank you very much to Brian K. from Lorain for your question.