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GUEST COLUMN

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Protect public health and Sarasota Bay, pick up after your pet!

Pooches for the Planet – Clean Waters! Clean Yards! Clean Shoes!

Pet waste is a significant source of nutrients and fecal coliform bacteria entering Sarasota Bay. Approximately 26 tons of pet waste is deposited on the ground in Sarasota and Manatee Counties every day! Dog poop does not stay on the grass but gets washed down the stormdrains and delivered untreated to the closest waterway during rain events.

Just like human waste, dog poop poses a threat to both public health and water quality. It contributes harmful bacteria that can make people ill, as well as excessive nutrients that cause algae blooms that in turn rob the water of oxygen needed to support fish and other marine life.

To address pet waste pollution the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program has teamed up with its sister program, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program to bring the successful *Pooches for the Planet* pet waste pollution education program to the Sarasota Bay watershed.

Did you know?

Four out of ten U.S. households have a dog.

Scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey estimate that pet waste contributes between 20 to 30 percent of the water pollution in America - bow WOW!

Fast Facts About Pet Waste:

- * An average-size dog dropping produces 3 billion fecal coliform bacteria.
- * Research has shown that up to 95 percent of the fecal coliform found in urban stormwater comes from animals.
- * Observations of people walking their pets in public areas show that men are less likely to pick up after their pets than women.
- * A new national survey says that 38 percent of dog owners don't clean up after their pets.

You can help keep local waterways, parks and your own neighborhood clean by taking the following actions:

- * Pick up after your pet. Bag your dog's waste and put it in a trashcan. Newspaper plastic bags or grocery bags are great for dog poop disposal. Biodegradable bags and dispensers that clip onto a leash are widely available at pet supply stores and pet departments in box stores.
- * If your pup goes inside you can flush the poop right down the toilet where it will be treated at a sewage treatment plant.
- * Never put waste into stormdrains. Whatever goes into the stormdrains flows untreated directly into streams, rivers and Sarasota Bay.
- * Spread the word about harmful impacts of dog poop on our waters to your friends and neighbors and encourage them to join the *Pooches for the Planet* pack!

Beginning in August 2009 Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and Tampa Bay Estuary Program are partnering with Manatee County Animal Services, Sarasota County Animal Services, Humane Society of Sarasota County and the Humane Society of Manatee County to promote *Pooches for the Planet* and pet adoptions through local shelters! Adopt a dog at a local shelter and get a free *Pooches for the Planet* adoption kit filled with valuable information and free goodies for you and your new family member!

Helping the community make sustainable choices for today and tomorrow is an integral part of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program's educational outreach mandate. For more information about *Pooches for the Planet* visit www.sarasotabay.org To watch a video about how pet waste pollutes our waterways visit <http://www.stormwater.ucf.edu/research/petwaste.htm>

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program is dedicated to restoring the area's greatest natural asset—Sarasota Bay. Its unique program strives to improve water quality, increase habitat and enhance the natural resources of the area for use and enjoyment by the public. Sarasota Bay is one of 28 estuaries in the United States that have been named by the U.S. Congress as an "estuary of national significance."

Julia Burch is the Outreach Coordinator for the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program