

## **WTE column of Jan 14, 2013. Editor's headline: Pick up after your dog, please**

When you walk your dog around the block day after day, you get to know your neighborhood. You get to know your neighbors, even those whose homes you never enter. This is especially true if you forego sidewalks in favor of strolling the alleys, which your pooch prefers.

First you get to know your dog-walking neighbors. Some carry pooper-scoopers or bags; others let their dogs poop where they may. A certain fence line that features a strip of grass between fence and sidewalk is often littered with pet waste. This is worrisome on two counts: 1) The sidewalk is frequented by school children—it leads directly to an elementary school—and the children veer off into the grass; 2) the owners have to mow there. If the clippings go in the “green waste” bin, the feces will contaminate the compostable material. (The same is true when you compost your own grass clippings and leaves: pet feces are a no-no, both in your veggie garden and in the composting contents used to replenish the soil.) The only other option is to clean up after your waste-dropping neighbors before you mow, a chore that’s doesn’t exactly foster community spirit.

When you walk your pet you’ll become incensed at the occasional owners who throw their pooch’s waste over the fence into the alley. Sometimes you scoop your own dog’s waste from among the filth discarded thus by a homeowner. What are these people thinking?

John Wagner of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality explains why pet owners should be attentive to animal waste. “Crow Creek has been identified as impaired from pollutants,” he says. “Pet waste is one component in urban runoff from storm drains in the streets.”

Bacterial contamination results. If you live downstream, and if you’re lucky, runoff is first pumped through artificial wetlands. Mr. Wagner lists a number of Crow-Creek pollutants he seeks to address, including contaminants coming from Frontier Refinery. Downstream water is often appropriated for human consumption.

When you walk your dog, it makes you think about garbage. Cheyenne offers trash pickup on sidewalks as well as in alleys. At the curb, bins of recyclables usually sit next to regular trash bins. Some alley arrangements are this way, too. A few homeowners even put their bins on cinder blocks to keep them out of the mud or snow.

Alas, owners who place their trash in the alley often put sacks of garbage right next to their bins. Have they not caught on that trash pickup has become automated? Leaving a bag of trash in the alley risks that it’s torn apart by possums or dogs. When you put out a bag, the truck operator must step out to pick it up manually.

“We don’t do this for free,” says Dennis Pino, Director of Waste Management. “Every bag of trash sitting out costs you \$3 on pickup day. Examine your bills.”

Perplexingly, some residents don’t bother with recyclables at all; they dump everything helter-skelter into the trash. Often their bins for recyclables are nowhere in sight. What has been done with them? Do these bins, turned on their sides, serve as substitute dog houses or cat refuges?

Dennis Pino takes pride in his work. “City of Cheyenne has made great strides in generating public awareness,” he says. Like Mr. Wagner, Mr. Pino is involved in an ongoing educational campaign. He visits schools to explain the recycling program to children, who are often tasked with taking out the trash. Sometimes parents learn from their children to “reduce, reuse, recycle.”

Styrofoam, glass bottles, and plastic sacks should not be added to the recycling bin. When these materials arrive at the station, someone must pick them out manually before the recyclables are compressed. You remember that virtually all stores now offer collecting bins for their plastic sacks. [www.cheuennecity.org](http://www.cheuennecity.org) offers more information, or you can call the phone number on your bill.

Mr. Pino is proud of his efforts regarding CFLs (the coiled bulbs) and fluorescent long bulbs, all of which are considered hazardous waste: they release harmful mercury dust when they break. “We now collect thousands of these bulbs at our station (off College Drive),” he says. “We get them from Warren Air Force Base, from businesses, from school districts.” Individual bulbs may be recycled in “bulb eaters” at Lowes, or you may bring them to the hazardous-waste collection site at his station. He wishes to remind you that batteries, too, are designated hazardous waste. They should not be disposed of in the trash. Businesses like Lowe’s and Murdock’s have battery-collecting bins on their premises.

Dennis Pino does have one complaint: the disposal of used motor oil. Some automobile owners, after changing the oil in their cars, hide a container of used oil in the recyclables bin. If the container isn’t spotted in time, it will explode as the bale is compressed for shipment. “When that happens, we lose the revenue from the entire batch.” Used motor oil may be brought to the station for recycling, and some automotive businesses accept the oil as well.

Fines are imposed when offenders are identified, and City of Cheyenne is rigorous in enforcing them. “Many of our practices have been adopted from Germany, a leader in the field.”

“It pays to recycle properly,” Mr. Pino observes. “When people discover that wastefulness is costly, they engage in appropriate recycling.”

Ditto the pet waste. At Lion’s Park the walking and biking paths at aren’t littered with feces as they once were: signs warn pet owners to clean up or risk fines, and dispensers

offer bags to that end.

May the spirit of cleaning up after yourself move into your neighborhood. May it be fostered via the threat of fines.