



Scoop the Poop Education Campaign in Austin, Texas

Background

The City of Austin's (CoA) Scoop the Poop Program began in June 2000 in response to elevated bacteria levels in Austin's lakes and creeks. The program launched with 25 pilot "mutt mitt" dispensers in City parks as a joint effort between the Watershed Protection Department (WPD) and Parks and Recreation Department (PARD). The funding and coordination of the program is provided by Watershed while PARD installs and maintains the dispensers. The program also had extra leverage under city code 3-4-6 defecation by a dog or cat, stating "An owner or handler shall promptly remove and sanitarly dispose of feces left on public or private property by a dog or cat being handled by the person, other than property owned by the owner or handler of the dog or cat." A violation of the code is a class C misdemeanor with a fine up to \$500.

Partners

- WPD funds Scoop the Poop program, orders mutt mitts and dispensers, coordinates outreach
- PARD -installs and maintains mutt mitt dispensers (restocks bags), responds to citizen complaints, enforces city code through Park police
- CoA Health and Human Services Department distributes information, coordinates volunteer cleanup events, enforces City code through animal control officers
- Austin Parks Foundation distributes information at off leash dog parks
- Keep Austin Beautiful coordinates volunteer cleanup events

Outreach

When the program began in 2000 there was no dedicated staff person to oversee the program. The outreach campaign consisted of radio spots, a media release, and giveaways (bandanas reading "Scoop the Poop, Dogs for the Environment" and frisbees) which were distributed at trade shows. New staff, hired in 2001, allowed the program to grow beyond the 25 pilot mutt mitt stations.

Scoop the Poop signs were installed at "mutt mitt" stations in 2002 upon request from citizens who felt the dispensers were being overlooked. Signs are made of aluminum and include the scoop the poop message and contact information to report empty dispensers. Additionally, smaller signs stating City ordinance 3-4-6 were installed below the dispensers. Currently, mutt mitt dispensers and signs can be found in 90 city parks (approximately 115 stations).

In order to expand the program beyond Austin parks and in response to citizen complaints regarding neighborhood dogs defecating in their yards, WPD produced complimentary "Scoop the Poop" yard signs. Originally, 4"x 11" signs were printed by a local sign shop; however, due to high demand the signs are now printed and laminated in-house. In 2007, 50 yard signs were mailed to citizens, and the number increased to 140 in 2008.



Yard sign



Mutt Mitt dispenser



Bag holder giveaway

Beyond “mutt mitt” stations

Austin citizens can find information about the program at the City website www.scoopthepoopaustin.org and download the Austin guide to Scoop the Poop brochures. Brochures are also distributed to Austin vet clinics, animal shelters, libraries, recreation centers and citizens upon request. Giveaways for fairs and trade shows include reusable pet trash bag holders with a clasp to clip onto a dog leash and “scoop the poop” t-shirts for volunteers. City staff have distributed brochures, mutt mitts and giveaways at the Mighty Texas Dog Walk, Movies in the Park (dog night), and other pet events attended by the Health and Human Services Department.

Program Statistics

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mutt mitts distributed</u>
2001	75,000
2003	535,000
2006	967,000
2008	2,800,000

- 700 dog feces piles were picked up by volunteers in one day at Auditorium Shores (80 acre off-leash dog park)
- Dog owners were surveyed in 2008 at an off leash dog park with excessively high bacteria in the adjacent creek. Post campaign survey results showed that 96% picked up their dog’s waste always/most of the time (compared to 87% pre-survey). Figure 1 (below) shows a comparison of dog owner awareness of the impacts of pet waste on water quality before and after bacteria education at the site.

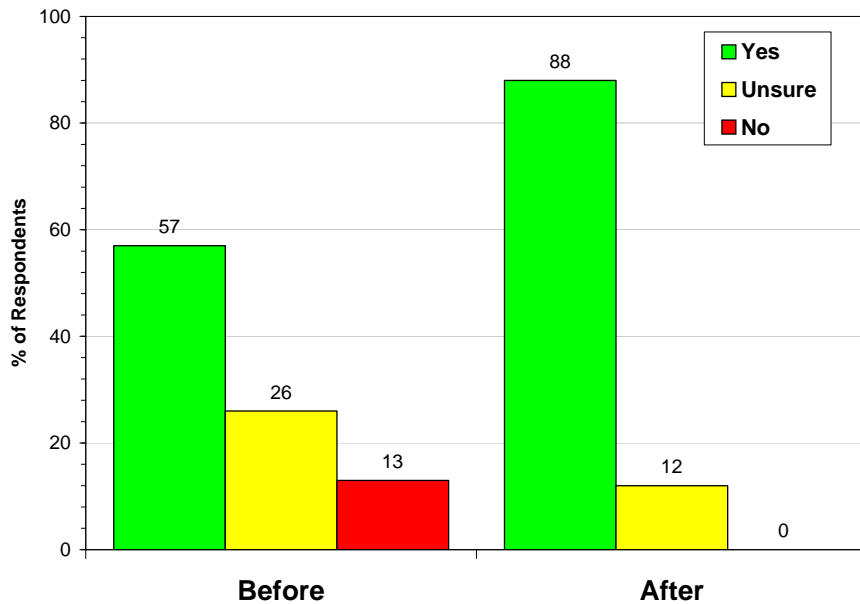


Figure 1. Results of dog park survey. “Do you think pet waste left on the ground pollutes local waterways?”

Program costs

Approximately \$10,000 was spent on the program in 2000. Currently, the combined cost for mutt mitts and dispensers is approximately \$72,000. An additional \$20,000 is spent on signs, brochures, giveaways, t-shirts, advertising, and staff time (approximately 12%).

Program obstacles

- Lack of law enforcement resources to enforce City Code 3-4-6
- Unusually high bacteria levels in off leash dog parks located next to water bodies
- Lack of resources to begin an urban campaign to address complaints by downtown residents and businesses about excessive dog waste downtown
- Lack of dog waste digester systems in parks (see “Dealing With Dog Waste In Vancouver Parks: Preliminary Research for Dog Waste Composting at Everett Crowley Park”)

http://vancouver.ca/parks/info/strategy/everettcrowleymgmtplan/pdf/report_dogfeces_compost.pdf

- Mounting program popularity taxing program budget

Studies

Lady Bird Lake

In the summer of 2001, the TCEQ (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality) launched a campaign to target pet owners who frequent trails around Lady Bird Lake in downtown Austin. TCEQ contracted Science Applications International Corporation to approximate the amount of dog waste deposited into the Town Lake watershed. The findings showed that [in 2001] there were approximately 30,308 dogs in the Town Lake

watershed. An estimated 1,327 lbs. of dog waste is deposited into the watershed every day or nearly 500,000 lbs. per year.

**Dog Waste Loading Analysis
Town Lake Watershed**

	Factors	Lbs. Removed	Pounds Deposited/day	Pounds/year
Dogs in Watershed	30,308			
Total desposited	0.32 lb/dog		9,699	3,539,974
Picked up by owners	10%	970	8,729	3,185,977
Trapped by buffers	20% of total not picked up	1,746	6,983	2,548,782
Deposited on impervious surface therefore directly discharged	10% of remainder	698	6,285	2,293,903
Returned to soil	90% of remainder on pervious	5,656	628	229,390
Impervious contribution from above			698	254,878
Waste Deposited			1,327	484,268
Percent Into streams (100/14)			14%	

Bull Creek Off-leash Park

In 2008, a contact recreation impairment was identified in Bull Creek District Park (one of twelve Austin park facilities designated as an off-leash area for dogs), most likely due to use of the park as an off-leash area for dogs. Figure 2 shows the comparative bacteria levels at various locations along Bull Creek. The levels are also eight times higher on weekends than weekdays when park visitors increase in the off-leash area.

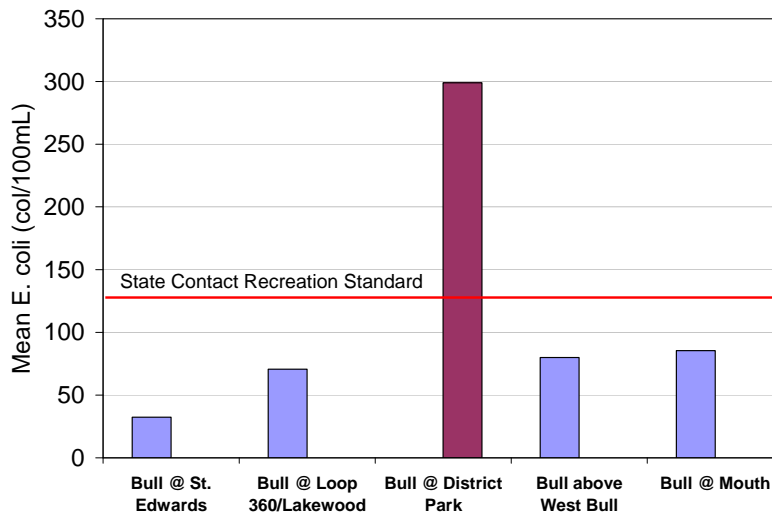


Figure 2. A comparison of Bull Creek bacteria levels. Sites presented in upstream to downstream order.

Following an assessment by a task force of WPDR, PARD, Austin Travis County Health Department and Austin Water Utility, a public education campaign was initiated March 7, 2008, in an attempt to inform park users about the importance of cleaning up after their pets. The campaign included a clean-up event, highly visible signage in the park (Figure 3), installation of additional Scoop the Poop boxes, a press conference with

good media coverage, public opinion surveys before and after the campaign, and increased park police and staff presence.

Although the campaign and surveys showed positive results and the bacteria levels in the off-leash area improved, those upstream of the park worsened. It appears that the dog owners either became more conscientious about scooping the poop in the off-leash area or wanted to keep their pets out of the polluted area and moved the problem elsewhere. After the post-education campaign monitoring was completed, a new citizen volunteer group (Bull Creek Dog Off-leash Group, of BCDOG) was formed in May 2008 and has been actively working on park clean-up. Decisions about the future status of the park have been postponed to allow the group time to remediate the park. Monitoring for six months (August 2008 to January 2009) will determine the effectiveness of the new efforts and decide the future status of the off-leash area of the park. [Click here for the full report](#) or visit www.ci.austin.tx.us/watershed/wq_scoop.htm

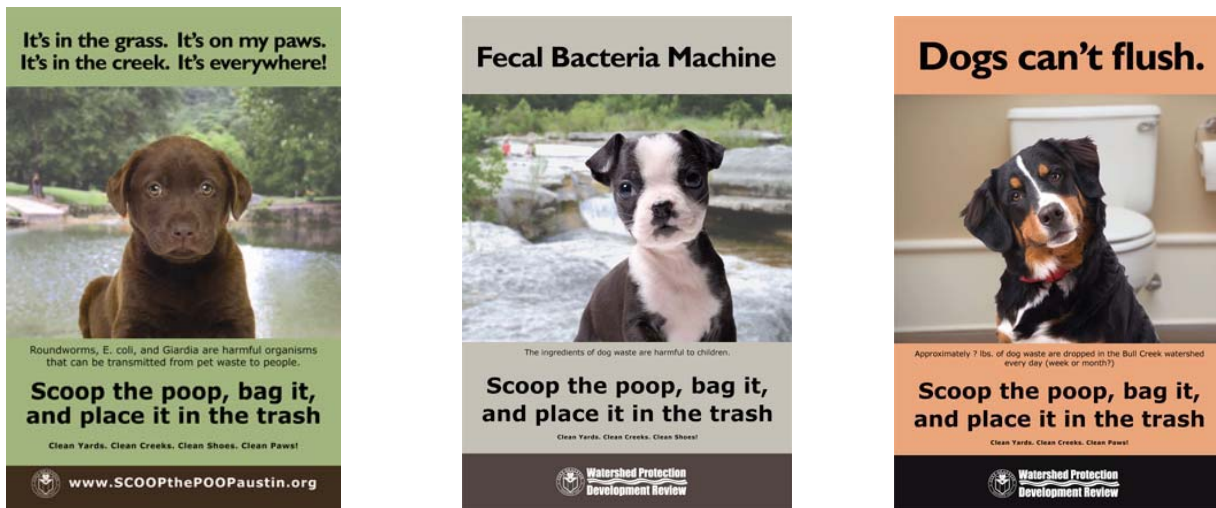


Figure 3. Bull Creek Off Leash Dog Park signs

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