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On Fear by Doug Koltavy



Part 1 : Presence

I was a complete basket case when my beloved Black Labrador, Beezer, was diagnosed with early stage kidney disease. The disease ultimately took his life on May 1, 2005 at age nine. Looking back, so much of that journey during his illness was consumed by FEAR. My fear for my dog, my fear for the journey, my fear for my own life after Beezer passed. It was a numbing to the bone kind of fear attendant to massive uninvited life changes. I progressively grew more depressed and unable to complete even simple day-to-day tasks. I spent my time in search of better doctors and better treatments, but most of all, I spent virtually every waking hour in paralyzing fear.

Beezer became my teacher during this time. He and I came to explore the nature of fear and soon developed strategies to cope with this emotion. Beezer never got better, but we learned how to enjoy each day together. I refined these lessons when his brother, Boomer, contracted bone cancer just over a year later. Looking back, my Journey with my trusty Labs was a grand success. Our relationship was never better than the time during their illnesses. Beezer and Boomer taught me how to not be afraid.

I realized that my two biggest problems were deeply ingrained with my concept of time — past, present and future. I would second guess and relive past decisions under the various headings of "Why didn't I try this before," "If only _____," and, my personal favorite, "It's my fault because _____." These episodes were simply my ego talking to me. My ego was infecting me with guilt over something that happened before. I decided that to feel guilty is nothing more than to live in the past.

Moreover, to live in fear is to live in the future. In the beginning, the dogs would watch in silent amazement as I rushed about obsessing over things that hadn't even happened. "How much time do we have?" "What if this happens in a week?" The problem with this thinking was that my fixation over the future caused me to ignore today. The key, I decided, was to avoid living in both the past and the future. I called this *presence*.

Presence is simply living in the moment. This proved to be a bit easier said than done.

Part 2 : To Fear is to Fuel

I began to think about the goal of a fatal disease. What did it want? Was I an accomplice, a victim, a witness? It had to be something. The easy response was "The disease wants to kill Beezer." However, is that really the goal?

I certainly understand that I will die someday from something. I also understood that Beezer would die someday from something. If so, then what does the fatal disease bring to the table that wasn't there yesterday? It cannot be death, because I understand that if you are born, you die. It is our contract from birth.

My answer was that the disease wanted me to give up today (the here and now). It's just that simple. The goal of a fatal disease is to get me to give up today. The disease accomplishes that goal through the infection of fear into me.

Today should be so very special because of the disease. I should cherish today as never before. Did I? Of course not. I was too busy living in fear of the future. A future that didn't exist today. A mirage in my mind. That was the goal of the disease. To plant the mirage and convince me to live in the future.

Now the sneaky part of the disease is that it couldn't rob me of today. It couldn't take today away from me over my objection. It wasn't that powerful. No, the disease had to trick me into giving up today. I would have this wonderful precious asset in my hands, today, and simply hand it over on a silver platter to the embezzler of today, the disease. I'd forfeit today to the con man, as if to say, "Here, you take today, I don't want it. I can't deal with today." Imagine that.

I realized my fear of the disease was the fuel that was being used against me. Devilishly clever, my biggest enemy was not the disease, but ME!. I was the power source being used to generate the very negative energy destroying my own being and wasting a special day with my beloved dog.

This paradox was glaring. I had thought the growing presence of disease was causing my mounting fear. In fact, just the opposite was occurring. My daily increasing fear was causing the disease to grow and become more powerful. I decided it was high time to start working for me and the Beez, not against us.

Part 3 : The Power of Meaning

Ever been stuck in traffic? Three lanes and nobody moving? I looked around once and was puzzled by what I saw. One person was laying on the horn, mouthing single syllable sentences punctuated by decisive gestures. One car over, another person was quietly singing a song of apparent significance. Both persons had the same incoming message -- stopped traffic -- but both persons attached a completely different meaning to the message. I wondered if I could apply that to my situation with Beezer?

I decided that incoming messages are neutral. That is, an incoming message means absolutely nothing until the listener attaches a meaning. Up to now, I'd been attaching fear as the meaning to every incoming message concerning Beezer. I decided to create different meanings to these same incoming messages.

I already knew the past (guilt) and the future (fear) were dangerous places for me. My strategy would be to create mechanisms and meanings which would keep me present. My safe zone was today. Whatever meaning I attached to the diseases had to allow me to remain present. I would starve the diseases of fuel because they cannot live in the present. I created three strategies.

Strategy #1 : Permanent Time-Out

The disease was part of our lives. I couldn't change that. I couldn't pretend the illness wasn't here. I had to deal with it, but I needed a way to relate to the disease on terms I could understand. I decided to give the disease a character.

I found an old "kiddie chair." I wrote "Kidney Disease Time Out Chair" on a piece of paper and glued it to the chair. I then placed the chair in a prominent place in my house. I then invited the disease to stay, but informed the disease that there were going to be several rules:

1. The disease could never again speak to me again without my permission. The disease could hold up signs like "Can I scare you today?" but planting words in my head was out.
2. The disease could stay in our lives as long as it wanted, but it was restricted to the permanent time-out chair. We were busy enjoying today and would try to make time for the disease later. So just sit tight and we'll get back to you.
3. The disease had to wear pink fuzzy slippers. Nothing on this planet is scary when sitting on a kiddie chair wearing pink fuzzy slippers. They play their games, I play mine.

I found the strategy helpful. The fact that the chair was out in the open was especially powerful because it reinforced my ability to control fear on a daily basis. Once, when feeling a bit scared, I composed myself and announced in a stern voice: "WHO SAID YOU COULD LEAVE THE TIME-OUT CHAIR?" It worked. I giggled and went back to my dog.

Strategy #2 : The Daily Point

Later on, Boomer helped me develop a game to deal with fear. As guys, we relish games where scores are kept and winners and losers determined. We created a game called the Daily Point. Here's how it worked.

Every day, one single point was up for grabs. Either Boomer and I would get the point or Team Fear (now with a second kiddie chair) would get the point. One day, one point. There weren't ties and we never had overtime. We had much fun every day with this game.

Each day we'd awake and Boomer and I would discuss how we were going to win today's point. Nothing else mattered. Even on the bad days, we'd stubbornly refuse to give in to fear for the simple reason that we didn't want to lose today's point. We became obsessed with enjoying today and never looking further than how to win "the point."

Strategy #3 : The Daily Appreciation

As Beezer grew more ill, I'd speak with him and give him my permission and blessing if he wanted to transition on his own. I didn't want him pushing beyond his time because of my selfish need to hang on. We started having these talks at night just before bedtime.

I also realized that Beezer might prefer to pass on his own, out of my presence. Of course, that could mean I might come home one day and find that my buddy had left. I decided we needed to talk about that as well. I didn't want any unfinished business or regret after it was too late to say a bit more.

We'd all gather on the bed and have a nightly discussion. Each exchange was different, yet the same. I'd start with telling each dog how much they meant to me and how lucky I was to have them in my life. I always thanked them for being in my life today. Sometimes we'd talk about fun times. Sometimes we'd talk about the difficult times. I'd explain the illness and my inability to change the outcome. I'd ask for input on how to spend what time we had left together. Above all, we always ended on a positive note by expressing our mutual love and deep appreciation for each other. I'd then immediately turn out the lights. I found these discussions of great comfort and continued them with Boomer after Beezer passed and later with my new Lab, Coral. It has become our nightly ritual.

My Hope For You

Of course, each journey is unique to the human and the animal. You should follow your instinct and always do what you think is best. What worked for me is nothing more than what worked for me.

I believe that everything happens for a reason and that reason helps me grow. I'm a much better person for the lessons taught by these two black dogs and am so deeply appreciative of our time on earth together. The B Brothers taught me to overcome fear and guilt. Along the way, I realized the abundance of love I showered on my dogs was the same love I withheld from myself.

In retrospect, I found my journey with my B Brothers was never about the body, it was always about the soul. I believe my Labs were sent to earth to teach me lessons I'd never have learned from any other teacher. In this way, our Journey with kidney disease and bone cancer was the most remarkable success story I've ever been involved with. A wonderful paradox that I would have missed entirely if I succumbed to fear.

Please be kind to yourself and enjoy today with your pet. You'll treasure this most special time for the rest of your life.

© Doug Koltavy

Doug & the B Brothers

From my upcoming book on overcoming fear and guilt when canine kids get sick.

Visit www.DougandtheBBrothers.com for more information.

July 7, 2007

In the previous article, Doug Koltavy shared his insight on coping when a cherished animal companion contracts a catastrophic disease. All too often, such diseases result in the death of a beloved pet, leaving the owner to suffer unbearable guilt. We are pleased and privileged to be able to share with you a list of reasons not to feel guilty, as compiled and sent back to earth by Doug's Black Labrador Retriever, Beezer.

BEEZER'S TOP TEN REASONS NOT TO FEEL GUILTY

(Compiled by Beezer, the Black Lab from the Bridge, and sent back to earth)

10. Jeez! If you're born, you die. Think about it dad.

9. Fear is the real enemy, not kidney disease. Fear is curable. I'm with you right now, just invisible. I'll be waiting at the Bridge when you arrive. Don't be afraid. Trust me.
8. Live with balance. The list of what went "right" with my life is so much bigger than the list of what went "wrong." My body died from kidney disease, but my spirit always soared because of you.
7. What you focus on expands. Honor my earthly life and memory. Does feeling guilty help you remember all our good times, adventures and mutual love?
6. Live with Presence! Don't despair about yesterday. Don't fear tomorrow. Otherwise, you'll miss out on the Gift of Today.
5. Thank you for taking my pain into your heart on that last day. I'm so proud of you for that selfless act.
4. Didn't you always forgive me when I made a mistake? I forgive you for any mistake you made during my illness. You made the best decisions possible with the information available at that time. All I took with me on my final earthly journey was our love. Please accept my forgiveness and release the guilt.
3. Pat yourself on the back in between crying. Your effort to treat me was a supreme act of humanity, love and compassion. Our relationship was never more meaningful than during my illness. Please recognize your character and commitment. I do.
2. Guilt is what you humans do to punish yourself for not being perfect.
1. You didn't have a cure for a fatal disease. My body stopped working because of this fatal disease, not because of something you did or did not do.

© Doug Koktavy (May 1, 2005)

Note: Excerpt reprinted with permission, from Doug's upcoming book on overcoming fear and guilt when canine kids get sick. For more information, visit Doug's website at www.DougandtheBBrothers.com .

Selecting a Good Dog Trainer/Behaviorist by Candice O'Connell



For most professional fields, there is usually a governing body that awards accreditation. Not so in the field of dog trainers and behaviorists. So where does a dog owner begin when looking for the right trainer or behaviorist?

Selecting a good trainer or behaviorist is akin to choosing a personal fitness trainer for you. You want someone who has good communication skills, someone who uses tools and training techniques that you are comfortable with, and you would like someone who motivates you. Ultimately, you want someone who will help you achieve the end-result you are seeking, e.g. a well-trained dog with good social skills.

As difficult as it might seem to find the right professional, there are some simple guidelines that may help you select a trainer or behaviorist and a training technique that is best suited to you and your canine companion.

A skilled and competent instructor will:

- Allow and encourage you to observe a class prior to making the decision to enroll;
- Encourage all family members and others who interact with the dog to attend class;
- Provide a clear explanation of each lesson and provide written handouts on how to teach the desired behavior(s);
- Demonstrate the behavior(s) that students will be teaching their dogs and allow ample time in class to begin practicing the day's lesson;
- Assist students individually with proper implementation of techniques; and
- Encourage dialogue and be courteous to both canine and human clients alike.

Every person and every dog is unique and so it may take a little effort to find the right trainer. You will know you have the right trainer if you are comfortable with the training tools and methods used. An experienced trainer employs humane training methods which are not harmful to the dog and/or handler. We do not recommend any trainer that advocates the practices of hanging, beating, kicking, shocking or similar procedures/devices that could cause the dog pain or distress or have the potential to cause physical injury.

Remember that you, as the dog owner, have the absolute right to stop any trainer or other animal care professional that, in your opinion, is causing your dog undue harm or distress.

A conscientious trainer stays informed about innovations in dog training and behavior modification. It is always a good idea to check the trainer's affiliation to any educational organizations such as the Canadian Association of Professional Pet Dog Trainers, Association of Pet Dog Trainers, and/or Professional Animal Behavior Associates, Inc. Ask if he/she pursues ongoing educational opportunities.

A good instructor will take care to protect your dog's health in a classroom or group setting. Ask if dogs and puppies are required to be vaccinated prior to class and, if so, which vaccines are mandatory. Make sure you and your veterinarian are comfortable with the vaccination requirements. If not, ask if titers (*) are acceptable.

Current clients are a valuable source of information for you. Attending a group class gives you the opportunity to ask clients how they feel about their experience, i.e. are they enjoying the class and are their training needs and goals being met.

Because of variables in dog breeding/temperament and owner commitment/experience, a trainer cannot and should not guarantee the results of his/her training. However, an instructor should be willing to ensure client satisfaction with his/her professional services.

Finally, training your dog is an important part of being a responsible owner/guardian. It will help you to understand and communicate with your dog. It will help your dog understand what you expect. And, it will strengthen the bond you and your dog share. But most of all, it should be fun for you and your dog.

(*) *Titers are blood tests that determine the presence and strength of a dog's immunological response to a viral disease.*

How to Select Professional Service Providers for your Dog by Candice O'Connell



With today's hectic schedules, it is sometimes hard to keep on top of all of the responsibilities of the job and family, including the dog. Many busy families are turning to a variety of pet services. But with the pet industry being basically unregulated, how do you know how to choose the best person for the job?

In this and the coming issues, we will try to provide some basic guidelines to help dog owners select the right professional. In this issue, we will focus on what to look for when hiring a professional dog walker.

Here are some simple suggestions of what to look for and questions to ask that you may want to consider in selecting a professional dog walker:

- Do your research. Ask for and follow up on client references.
 - Is dog walker insured and bonded?
 - Is he/she is registered with a professional association like the All Canadian Pet Services Network or the Professional Dog Walkers Association International?
 - Does he/she have any training in animal first aid, animal behavior or dog obedience?
 - Does he/she assess each dog for temperament?
 - Why he/she became a dog walker? How long they have been a professional dog walker?
 - How many dogs he/she walks at one time? Ask yourself if you are comfortable with the number. Most professional dog walkers will not walk more than six dogs on leash at one time.
 - Where does he/she usually walk the dogs?
 - Does he/she have a dog or dogs of his/her own?
 - Ask to accompany the dog walker on a regular walk. You will want to see how he/she interacts with the dogs, especially your dog.
 - Make sure that you agree on a fixed price and the number and length of walks per week.
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Small Dogs are Real Dogs Too by Sarah Jane Cuff

My husband and I were out one evening walking our furry four-legged 'kids' Sparkle and Sunshine, a 3lb Yorkshire terrier and a 50 lb Bernese mountain puppy respectively. As we turned the corner, we noticed a golden retriever and his owner headed in our direction. Of course, Sparkle and Sunshine both wanted to say hi so we let the pups greet each other.



Sunshine and Sparkle

As the dogs were playing together, the retriever's owner leaned over to pat Sunshine telling her what a gorgeous dog she is. Then she glanced at Sparkle dressed in her little pink t-shirt and pink hair bow. In a tone of either disgust or disbelief she said, "And look at that lame excuse for a dog!" Unfortunately, that is not the first time I have encountered the thinking that tiny dogs are not real dogs. Having learned not to take offence when someone criticizes my little dog, I prefer to imagine how people would react if only they knew just how much of a 'real' dog she truly is. When she goes for walks beside me on her leash, Sparkle has the same stamina as Sunshine. Her recall is amazing. She sits when asked. And despite owning doggy pajamas, a rain coat and multiple t-shirts and sweaters (all of which aid in keeping her tiny body warm—they are not just fashion statements), Sparkle is just as eager as Sunshine to play fetch or roll in the grass.

Yes, small dogs are real dogs too. While some people have a personal preference for one size over the other, all dogs are capable of being your best friend. Even if an adverse behaviour common in dogs of a certain size is the issue, it is amazing how proper training can eliminate it. In the end, both tiny dogs and large dogs are wonderful companions who enhance our quality of life, as long as they are loved, cared for and taught good manners.

Aussie Rescue and Placement Helpline, Inc. (ARPH) by Ginnette Wilson



In increasing numbers, people are falling in love with the Australian Shepherd breed. The versatile, athletic and intelligent "Aussie", with its beautiful array of coat colours, intensely loyal nature and enormous grin, is showing up regularly in everything from the movies and advertisements, to herding and agility competitions. But popularity comes with a price - many owners find their new Aussie too energetic, that beautiful coat sheds, and why is he barking when alone in the yard? For any number of reasons, and through no fault of their own, more and more Aussies are finding themselves homeless.

ARPH, the official rescue organization of the Australian Shepherd Club of America (ASCA), is dedicated to a happy ending for every Aussie. Active throughout Canada and the U.S., ARPH volunteers offer a fresh start for orphaned Aussies, as well as a support network for owners. ARPH has matched hundreds of homeless Aussies with appropriate homes, many of them right here in Ottawa. ARPH representatives, foster homes, and volunteers are accepted only after a thorough background check. Each receives instruction in proper placement procedures and the care of rescue dogs.



In addition to representatives and foster homes who deal directly with the dogs, ARPH has other volunteers who perform many varied and necessary tasks.

The ARPH Team is comprised of people with all sorts of experiences, from breeders to pet owners, and each volunteer brings his or her own individual expertise to the rescue effort.

ARPH charges an adoption fee for Aussies they place in new homes but this is never enough to cover expenses. Ordinary vet costs (vaccinations, spay/neuter, heartworm test and preventative, etc) often exceed adoption fees, and the rescue never recoups the day-to-day, miscellaneous expenses of housing foster dogs. All dogs adopted out are spayed or neutered. ARPH's rescue efforts are also supported by donations from those who love the breed, including donations from the Australian Shepherd Club of America and donations received from adopting homes.

Every responsible breeder knows that the gene that produces the stunning mottled effect, called "merle" in many Aussies can also produce deafness and/or blindness when two merles are bred together. Unscrupulous breeders know that a merle pup can bring a high price and are willing to risk it to better their odds. The result can be a dog like Tilly. At just 9 days old, pure white and stone deaf, tiny Tilly was dumped in a parking lot. Luckily, she was found and, for four weeks, was fostered by an employee of the Bayview Veterinary Hospital. Brought into the ARPH program, a volunteer with a deaf Aussie of her own became Tilly's new foster mom. For the next two months, she nursed her through a serious illness, taught her hand signals, and brought her to work every day. Tilly clearly didn't know or care that she was supposed to be "different". She developed an outgoing, happy-go-lucky personality, and quickly gained a serious fan club. The day Tilly went to her forever home was one of great joy, but also sadness, for all those she left behind.

There are many stories like Tilly's, and many more wonderful dogs waiting for their forever homes. If you are interested in learning more about the Australian Shepherd, considering fostering or adopting a rescued Aussie or interested in exploring other ways you can help, please visit ARPH Ontario's website at <http://www.ontarioaussies.ca/> or contact one of our Ontario representatives: in Southern Ontario, Niki at Niki.Karras@gmail.com and in Central Ontario, Nicole at aussierescue@rogers.com.

Park Etiquette

As the warmer weather approaches, more and more people will be taking to the outdoors to walk their dogs. In multi-use parks and trails, certain activities do not blend easily and extra effort is needed to ensure that the possibility of problems and conflict are minimized.

Dog walking is a privilege. Please help to maintain and expand access to public parks and trails by following a few simple rules.

- ✓ Obey the regulations regarding on-leash and off-leash areas (even if you don't agree with them).
- ✓ Have your dog(s) under control at all times - dogs that do not respond to voice commands or hand signals should not be allowed off leash.
- ✓ Always leash your dog(s) in parking lots. Loose dogs in parking lots are at risk.
- ✓ Always pick up after your dog(s). If you cannot find where your dog(s) pooped, then ease your conscience by picking up another dog's offering.
- ✓ Remember the 5-second rule. Chat with friends but makes sure your eyes connect with your dog every five seconds. That way, you will notice if they misbehave or poop.
- ✓ **Please, please, please** do not hang poop bags on trees or leave them on the ground; even if you plan to collect them up on your way back, you may forget or take a different route. Left-over poop bags are unsightly, unhygienic and are a constant source of complaints.
- ✓ Please do not allow your dog(s) to dig holes. They pose a safety hazard for walkers and dogs.
- ✓ Respect the rights of all park users - dog walkers and others. Do not let your dog(s) behave inappropriately towards people and other dogs. Be especially careful if there are children, joggers or cyclists around.

POOP, SCOOP AND COMPOST - "A Doo-Able Project"

Proposal to Explore the Feasibility of Composting Dog Waste in Public Parks

Prepared by: Lyn Taylor, Director, National Capital Coalition for People and Dogs
September 16, 2004

Project Purpose

The purpose of this proposal is to explore the possibility of finding a more user and environmentally-friendly alternative to deal with the issue of pet waste disposal. It proposes a solution which the National Capital Coalition for People and Dogs believes is:

- innovative
- acceptable to dog owners, NCC, city officials, all users of public spaces
- friendly to the environment
- economically feasible

Project Objective

The objectives are as follows:

- To set up on-site composting system(s) to test whether dog waste can be successfully composted to produce an end product which is pathogen free, and safe to use as a soil amendment and fertilizer
- To produce a guide to composting dog waste based on the results of the project

The Problem

In the City of Ottawa, the issue of dog "waste" disposal has become very contentious. An amendment to the Poop and Scoop By-Laws, which were enforced in April 2003, requires that dog owners take home their dogs' waste from public parks and dispose of it on their own premises. They are no longer allowed to dispose of it in garbage containers in public places. Flushing it down the toilet is the method of disposal recommended by the City. Also, the National Capital Animal Regulations (May 2002) require that dog waste be removed from their property and discarded at home.

Unfortunately, these new by-laws have started to create more problems than they were designed to solve. Judging from the increased amount of pet feces being left on the ground in dog walking areas such as Conroy and Bruce Pits, more and more pet owners are less inclined to pick it up at all - a retrogressive step since the poop and scoop by-law had, until now, been quite successful in reducing the amount of pet waste. And those who do take it home are more likely to put it in their own garbage containers than to flush it, so it still has to be picked up and hauled to the landfill. Nor is flushing it down the toilet an ideal solution, as this only increases water usage, and adds to the problem of sewage pollution. In a book entitled "*Diary of a Compost Hotline Operator*", the author Spring Gillard reports that in Vancouver, B.C., the sewage treatment plants are not all that hot on flushing. It seems the "nuggets" (as they are called) are rock hard and gum up the whole sewage system. Plants have to be retrofitted at great expense with special masticators to grind the material up.

In the City of Ottawa there are between 60,000 and 80,000 (Source: Citizen article, March 23, 2003). If each dog produces an average of $\frac{3}{4}$ pound of waste per day, that is approximately 52,500 pounds total per day, or over 8,000 metric tons per year in Ottawa alone. That is a lot of manure! By treating it as a "waste" product and putting it into landfills, or flushing it down the drain, are we throwing out a valuable resource that could be put to good use?

Composted horse manure, cow manure, sheep manure, and even "humanure" in some places are considered to be a valuable agricultural resource to improve soil structure and fertility. Why not dog manure? Is it possible to change our thinking about dog feces as a "waste" product and start to think of it as a renewable resource? Can we recycle it and turn it into compost, thus keeping it out of the environment and underground?

If dog manure could be turned into compost, there would be many benefits. These include:

- Eliminating disposal problems and reducing the amount of waste going to landfills and into the sewers;
- Providing nutrients to fertilize plant growth, and organic matter to improve soil structure, drainage, and water retention;
- Lowering the risk of contaminating surface and ground water;
- Making parks, and public walking areas more desirable and reducing the antagonism between dog owners and non-dog owners.

Composting Dog Waste (the Scoop on Dog Poop)

Almost without exception, dog waste is listed as a "no-no" when it comes to composting. It contains bacteria and pathogens that can be harmful to humans. Of greatest concern are parasitic worms, and of particular concern are roundworms, tapeworms and hookworms. Also, like other animal manures, dog manure is high in nitrogen so it significantly affects the ratio of carbon to nitrogen ratio, which significantly affects the decomposition process. (The bacteria and fungi in compost digest or "oxidize" carbon as an energy source, and ingest nitrogen for protein synthesis.)

But what if we could create conditions in the compost pile where temperatures were high enough to kill the pathogens, and the addition of materials high in carbon created the required C/N?

The Alaska Experience

In 1991, the Fairbanks (Alaska) Soil and Water Conservation District started a study to determine the feasibility of composting dog waste in Interior Alaska. With an estimated population of over 20,000 dogs within a 7,000 square mile Borough where dogs are used for transportation, recreation and competitive sports, the volume of dog manure and its disposal were becoming a major problem as pollution from dog waste can pose a severe threat to water quality, wildlife and public health.

Kennel owners were recruited to participate in a number of field studies. Several composting systems were used (e.g. wire bins, rigid plastic bins, and open piles). Carbon sources were identified (straw, chopped straw, birch sawdust, and hardwood sawdust), and various ratios of dog waste to carbon sources were tested (1:1, 2:1, 1:2, 3:1). The dog owners were instructed to add dog manure to the bins, mix it thoroughly with a carbon source and add small amounts of water until the compost mixture was "as moist as a wrung out sponge" (50-60%). They continued adding ingredients until the compost was 2 to 3 feet deep, then placed a cover over the mixture and let the temperature rise. No fresh materials were added after the bin was full.

Average internal temperatures were recorded daily with long-stemmed thermometers. When the temperature dropped below the ideal composting range (deemed to be 130 to 170 degrees), the compost was turned to reintroduce oxygen and to assure that the waste on the outside of the pile got a chance to cook. This process was repeated until it turned into a crumbly, black, dirt-like mixture. Cooking time varied, but was usually from 4-8 weeks.

Laboratory analysis proved that the resultant compost was free of *Toxicara canis*, or large roundworms (one of the most heat-resistant pathogens found in dog manure and the most difficult to kill). This was true for the dog waste which was known (by testing) to have contained the parasite prior to composting. Nutrient analysis showed that the composted waste was high in nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. Salt levels were high but this is common in compost made from most materials. The pH of the finished compost was consistently close to neutral.

They concluded that "good composting" of dog waste is possible. It reduces the volume of waste by over 50% and produces compost, which is essentially odourless and pathogen free, thus eliminating the need to transport the waste to a disposal facility, saving time, energy and landfill space. The compost makes an excellent soil amendment but the high salt levels are too high for it to be used as fertilizer, although they acknowledged that curing it over winter or for a year would reduce the salt levels.

Project Challenges

To set up test situations, it is clear that there are many factors that will need to be carefully considered in the planning stages. These include (in no particular order):

Carbon Sources - Type and Quantity

As mentioned earlier, carbon must be added to the high nitrogen dog waste to achieve the appropriate carbon to nitrogen ratio needed for micro-organisms to thrive. The C:N ratio is critical for achieving high temperatures and the rapid decomposition of the waste. No matter what the source of carbon, the experiment in Alaska found that a ratio of two parts (by volume) of dog waste to one part carbon was the ideal combination. (However, it should be noted that the Alaska study was done with working dogs with a high protein diet, so ratios of dog waste to carbon need to be evaluated for other types of diets.)

Sources of carbon rich materials will need to be found which are available in sufficient quantities, accessible, and affordable. (Possibilities include straw, sawdust, leaves, etc.)

Composting Systems/Bins

Different types of bins have advantages and disadvantages but they need to be able to produce enough mass to retain heat. A 3 foot square is recommended in the Alaskan study.

Whatever type of bin is used, it needs to provide adequate ventilation so the compost will reach high enough temperatures to destroy pathogens. Other factors to consider are ease of turning, heat retention, and protection from the elements (rain, sun and wind).

The test site will probably need several containers, which will be at different stages of decomposition over time. They will need to be located in secure positions where they can be managed carefully and systematically to ensure the proper process is followed.

Location of Bins

Bins will need to be located where they are accessible but will not interfere with park users. Aesthetically, it would be better if they were screened from view. They should be protected from drying winds and in partial sunlight to help heat the pile.

Temperature

The temperature of a compost mixture is very important as it reflects the level of microbial activity. Daily temperatures of 130 - 170° F for several days are needed to destroy weed seeds and pathogens . It is proposed that a compost thermometer be used to monitor the temperature of the compost mixture on a daily basis.

Volume of dog waste

The Alaska study concluded that it takes at least 10 dogs, preferably 20, to generate enough waste a pile large enough (3-5" cube) to provide insulation and keep temperatures at the center of the pile.

Moisture

A mixture that is 50-60% water is recommended, so a source of water will be required (e.g. rain barrels?). The more wind and sun exposure, the more water will be needed.

Curing Period

A long curing period after the thermophilic stage will probably need to be built in to add a safety net for pathogen destruction.

Flies and Odours

Odours and flies can be controlled by covering the compost with a layer of sawdust or finished compost. Once the pile heats up it is too hot for fly eggs to survive.

Composting in Winter

In colder weather, the compost process slows down and eventually stops so dog waste will build up in the winter months. However, with planning, the build-up can be effectively composted in the warmer months. The Alaskan report suggests: picking a composting site in the sun; avoiding mixing excess snow with the dog waste; storing the compost ingredients in bins over winter and turning them in spring to begin the composting process.

Health Concerns

Careful monitoring and proper management of the compost is important to ensure that the compost which is produced is safe and meets all the standards and regulations , with particular emphasis on the pathogen analysis and C/N ratio.

Compliance and Waste Collection

A major consideration will be how to get dog owners to cooperate in the project, to pick up the waste and dispose of it properly in the bins provided.

As most dog owners use plastic to pick up their dog's waste, there will need to be an education component to ensure that dog owners fully understand the importance of keeping plastic and other non-biodegradable materials out of the system.

To address this problem, attempts will be made to find sources of biodegradable bags which are fully compostable, and to find a sponsor who will fund supplies for the duration of the test. Also, a "sorting process" will need to be built into the management of the project.

Disposal of End Product

Consideration will need to be given to how and where end product can be put to good use. If it is deemed that the end product is

safe to use, there are a number of possibilities for this. For example, display gardens could be set up to demonstrate its effectiveness and value. Depending on the outcomes (quality and quantity), there is even a possibility of building in a cost-recovery component.

Proposed Action Plan

- Review literature and research options for dog waste disposal
- Identify and approach potential partners and project advisers/consultants; set up Advisory Group
- Identify and approach potential funders (project grants and/or sponsorship of supplies)
- Identify potential sites and solicit permission to set up sites as required
- In consultation with advisers, develop "protocol"/logistics, e.g. compost "recipes", collection methods, management, appropriate containers, location of bins, monitoring, data collection and recording, etc.
- Develop educational and information materials to deal with compliance issues
- Prepare sites
- On-going management of sites, data collection, etc.
- Test end product
- Distribute end product
- Follow-up - share learnings from the project (guides, brochures, information packages, seminars, etc.)

Conclusion

Composting may be a safe and effective method for disposing of dog waste, given proper conditions and careful management (e.g. composters installed in secure areas; additions of appropriate carbon sources; proper loading, monitoring and mixing; disposal of output, etc.). The NCCPD believes that further investigation and testing are warranted to determine the feasibility and cost effectiveness of composting as a viable option for the problem of dog waste disposal in public areas in the National Capital Region.

references:

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See "The Four Criteria for Compost: Maturity, Foreign Matter, Trace Elements and Pathogens" on the website of the Composting Council of Canada (www.compost.org/standard.html)

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