

The Poop on Downtown Dog Owners

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Derek Newman joined volunteers recently to clean up downtown dog poop during the first "Poo to Brew" event. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

By Kim Mueller

Combining dog poop and beer seemed like a great idea to Jena Newman who convinced a dozen volunteers to spend their Sunday morning picking up pet waste during downtown's first "Poo to Brew" event earlier this month.

"I'm not scared of any poop," said Newman, a former Kansas City zookeeper, as she picked up another handful of dog feces.

"Not only is this gross for our shoes, but the poor dogs are having to walk around these land mines."

Newman, who now operates [Newman's Dog Training](#), organized the community sweep to raise awareness with dog owners not to use the city's flowerbeds and grass patches as public pet restrooms.

After one hour, volunteers each filled one to two trash bags with dog poop before rewarding themselves with a beer at the [Torn Label Brewing Company](#).

But the morning's work was only a start.

There are an estimated 7,685 dogs living downtown, according to a formula used by the American Veterinary Medical Association based on the number of households.

Those animals produce an estimated 476,253 pounds of poop each year, according to the Association of Professional Animal Waste.

And the EPA estimates a single gram of dog feces can contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria, which can cause cramps, diarrhea, intestinal illness, and serious kidney disorders in humans.

"Their poop is toxic," Newman explained. "Dogs are carnivores. Carnivore poop is not fertilizer. It is astonishing how difficult it is to get people to pick up after their dogs."

City codes require pet owners to [pick up their pets poop](#), but many dog owners ignore the rules, said veterinarian Jason Doss.

"People are either too lazy or just plain stupid," Doss explained.

He was walking his Border Collie downtown past the award-winning Central Library garage where grass once grew. Now piles of poop circle the pet waste stations stocked with free bags.



Signs urge pet owner to clean up after animal next to the Central Library. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

Doss has seen it all.

During the bad weather, the downtown resident said he routinely witnessed his neighbors at One Light Luxury Apartments release their dogs onto the city-owned Green Roof Park at 1211 Main Street.

Large signs remind owners of the city's law requiring all dogs to be kept on a leash. Yet, dogs roamed free while their owners often stood inside the hallway watching their canine companions squatting in the park, Doss said.

The owners never ventured outside to pick up the poop, he said. The grass died. And the feces multiplied.

So Doss moved to the Power and Light apartments where Doss objected as a neighbor let his two large Labradors climb over and defecate inside the fenced flowerbeds in front of the building.

Small dogs regularly pee on the sidewalk entry, creating an overwhelming urine stench during the summer, he said.

"No one dumps their trash out their front door," Doss said incredulously. "I know accidents happen once in a while, but — good God — you can see the stains going up and down the street."

Unlike many downtown high rises, Power & Light apartments at 1320 Baltimore Ave. offer their residents a fenced pet enclosure with pet refuse bags, baskets and scoops as well as a decorative, red fire hydrant for inspiration.



Volunteers gather at the first "Poo to Brew" event downtown. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

Residents are encouraged to take Fido or FiFi to the private plot to do their business before strolling through downtown.

But not all downtown landlords are as responsible as Power & Light, said Jared Campbell, president of the [Downtown Neighborhood Association](#). Commerce Towers, a self-described "vertical neighborhood," definitely isn't a good neighbor, he said.

Tree wells and landscape flowerbeds once overflowed with ornamental plants near Commerce Tower before the renovated historic tower at 911 Main Street opened its 355 new apartments and in-door dog park a year ago.

The streetscape around Commerce Towers is filled with dead plants and dog poop.

"We didn't see that before Commerce Towers were turned into apartments," Campbell said. "They should be better downtown partners in self policing if their residents aren't going to do it."

At least two downtown landlords are taking a proactive step toward keeping their green spaces green. Cold Storage Lofts at 500 E. 3rd Street and Union Berkley Riverfront apartments at 1000 Berkley Parkway require residents to register their dogs' DNA.

A dog's DNA is collected by swabbing the animal's mouths. Dog feces found in the area will be sent to a lab and compared to the DNA samples. After discovering a match, the apartment will fine the appropriate resident.

DNA testing and community sweeps are good first steps toward solving downtown's poop problem, but dog owners also need to become more responsible, Campbell said.

When owners don't act responsibly, he suggested that people speak up and practice a Midwest style of public shaming by politely handing the perpetrator a plastic bag when the pet owner starts to flee Fido's excrement.

Newman agreed.

"Public shaming may be the only way to do it," she said. "It is not a lot of fun, but there has to be some way of holding people accountable."



Since dogs can't read, it's up to owners to do the right thing. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

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