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My dog, Tigger, has a great time when I take him to the beach. I'm not sure why he likes to chase and bite at the frothy waves rolling up on the shore, but he could be entertained for hours if I let him, just running back and forth in the surf.

Three things I make sure to do when I take my dog to a beach. First, make sure dogs are allowed at the beach in question. Second, take fresh water and a container to put it in so he'll have something to drink. Lastly, pack a poop kit. What is a poop kit you might ask? This kit consists of a couple of easy to carry implements that are readily available in most households: a plastic spoon or scooper of some type, and a plastic bag.

There are very important reasons one should clean up after their pet on the beach. The first one the might spring to mind is what I like to call the "ugh!" factor. Nobody wants to step in a squishy beach surprise while they're strolling along the sand. Scooping up after your pet, however, is not just a courtesy for those walking behind you, it's the right thing to do for your family's health and well being, and for the environment.

Environmentally, pet waste contributes to the nonpoint source pollution that enters our waterways everyday. When pet waste is not properly disposed of, it can be washed directly into our local swimming, fishing and recreational waters, complete with harmful bacteria and microorganisms that can cause human sickness. We take care to prevent human sewage from leaking into our water, and it is important that we prevent pet waste as well. New Hampshire scientists have found that dogs are a significant contributor of bacteria in some surface waters by using DNA to match specific bacterial

types, and have had swimming beaches and shellfish beds commonly shut down due to bacteria contamination.

Dog waste doesn't only matter on the beach, it is one of many pollutants from our own neighborhoods that add to water pollution. Everyday items that everyone uses contribute to nonpoint source pollution, such as lawn fertilizers, motor oil, pesticides, and soapy water from washing cars in driveways. These items commonly are washed into storm drains when it rains, and then flow straight to our local waterways.

It is easy to be part of the solution to pet waste contamination. Always carry a plastic bag with you when you walk your dog, whether on the beach or around your own neighborhood. Put the closed bag in the trash can, don't place the bagged or un-bagged pet waste in a storm drain or hose the pet waste towards storm drains. If you have a large yard, you may bury un-bagged pet waste in the yard at least 5 inches in the ground and away from vegetable gardens and waterways. Dispose of pet waste properly, and avoid the environmental and health hazards associated with it.

The websites www.orangebeach.com and www.gulfshores.com have regulations regarding dogs on those beaches. Dauphin Island allows dogs on the beach, though they must be either under voice command or, ideally, on a leash. Don't forget to pack your poop kit! Contact Shonda Borden at the Auburn Marine Extension and Research Center at (251) 438-5690, or by email at bordesm@auburn.edu for more information.