

Mutt Mitt Survey Summary

Results of surveys of Mutt Mitt station sponsors and users

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Executive Summary

Sponsor and users of Mutt Mitt stations were surveyed to assess the program's success. Survey results indicate that sponsors and users are different audiences with different motivators. Based on survey results, convenience appears to be a primary barrier for proper disposal of pet waste. While adding additional waste bins in problem areas would help make proper disposal more convenient for users, the difficulty of waste removal is a barrier for sponsors. Making both pet waste disposal and garbage removal more convenient should have a positive impact on the number of people participating in the environmentally responsible behavior. Additional recommendations include making pet waste pick-up more convenient by offering clip-on bag dispensers and encouraging sponsors by acknowledging their hard work and accomplishments in news or magazine articles. These articles will also serve the purpose of promoting the program and desired behavior, and further normalizing proper pet waste disposal.

Background

The Pet Waste in Public Areas Program (aka Mutt Mitt program) began in 2006 as a pilot project by the Kitsap Public Health District in response to bacterial pollution beach closures at the Indianola Public Dock. Excess dog waste on the beaches was suspected to be the cause of the beach closures. Subsequently, in 2008, proper pet waste management was selected by the West Sound Stormwater Outreach Group (WSSOG) as the NPDES permit required targeted behavior change program for meeting permit compliance. This group is a consortium of Kitsap Peninsula Cities, Kitsap County, and the Navy. The program has grown significantly from 4 stations in Indianola to over 350 stations region wide. The program continues to grow each year with 20 – 40 new stations adopted. The stations sponsors are enthusiastic about sponsoring the solution to the problem of dog waste in their public areas.

Purpose

Performance measure data is collected annually and tracked for the number of stations adopted, number and percentage of stations maintained by community sponsors, number of bags used and then calculating the tons of dog waste diverted from surface waters. In 2013 the program assisted dog owners in picking up over 100 tons of poop. As the program has matured, anecdotal feedback from local station sponsors was received about frustration that not all dog owners were picking up or that periodically bags of poop were left on the ground rather than in trash cans. The purpose of this project was to learn from the two target audiences about their attitudes and awareness, to solicit comments about adoption of the habit to pick up and put pet waste in the trash, and gather information to assist with further improvements of the program.

For Mutt Mitt Station sponsors the study questions included (See Appendix A for complete survey):

- Why do you sponsor a station?
- Are you likely to continue sponsorship?
- Have the Mutt Mitt stations had an impact on the amount of pet waste left in your area?

For Mutt Mitt Station users the study questions included (See Appendix B for complete survey):

- How frequently do you pick up after your dog?

- On an occasion when you may not have picked up after your dog, what was the main reason?
- What impact has the Mutt Mitt program had on pick-up rates in areas you frequent?

Methods

Two separate surveys were designed, one for Mutt Mitt station sponsors and one for Mutt Mitt station users. Both surveys were designed with the assistance of Ellen Cunningham Environmental to ensure that questions were well-designed and that surveys yielded information that could be used to help guide the program.

Sponsors

A link to the Sponsor Survey was sent via email to 101 Mutt Mitt sponsors on 9/9/2014 and a reminder e-mail was sent on 9/16/2014. Sponsors could opt-in at the end of the survey to be eligible to win either a green cleaning kit or 200 Mutt Mitt bags (each an approximately \$15.00 value) for participating in the survey. A total of 48 unique responses were received, a 47.5% response rate.

Users

Surveys conducted at three public dog walking sites: Clear Creek Trail including the Silverdale Dog Park (8/11/2014, 9/27/2014), Howe Farm (8/11/2014, 8/16/2014), and South Kitsap Regional Park (8/11/2014). Surveys were conducted in the morning from 8:00 am to 11:00am. A total of 82 surveys were completed. Those administering the written survey tried to give respondents as much anonymity as possible to encourage honest answers; however, frequently, respondents asked for help in filling out the survey. Users were offered a clip-on bag dispenser, dog bandana, or flashlight as an incentive. While the percentage of people that were willing to take the survey was not tracked, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of those asked to take the survey, agreed to take it.

Key Findings

Mutt Mitt Station Community Sponsors

Main Reason for Sponsoring Mutt Mitt Station

- **Protecting water quality** was the top reason (38%)
- **Making an area friendlier to both dog and non-dog owners** was the second most common reason (29%).

Sponsors View their Contribution has a Positive Effect and Desire to Continue Sponsorship

- All sponsors felt that the Mutt Mitt stations had a positive effect on the amount of pet waste left on the ground and most (93%) felt the program had a major or moderate effect. This is echoed in the fact that most sponsors felt they were likely to continue sponsoring the Mutt Mitt station(s). Seventy-seven percent of respondents said they were “extremely likely” to continue sponsoring a station(s) and 19% said they were “very likely”.

“[I] wanted to give the tools to our residents to encourage them to clean up and respect their neighbors. It is unsanitary and [I] want to help keep our community clean and sanitary.” – Mutt Mitt Sponsor

Nineteen percent of sponsors were interested in joining a Mutt Mitt sponsors Facebook page to share successes and challenges.

Sponsor Suggestions to Improve the Program - At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they had any suggestions for how we could make the Mutt Mitt program more successful and if there was anything else they wanted to share about their experience sponsoring a Mutt Mitt station. Responses to both questions seemed to be very similar, so all answers were combined and categorized, with each unique response from an individual being counted.

“Help with the cost of bags. I'm a volunteer, and I can't afford those very expensive bags!” – Mutt Mitt Sponsor

- **Consider Ways to Reduce the Program Expense.** Sponsors were concerned about the expense of maintaining a station (purchasing the bags) and some wanted to see the program advertised more so that more sponsors would join.
- The most common response from sponsors, aside from general praise, was that we should **promote and share successes of program more.**
- **Clarify the Potential Confusing Message about Disposal.** While none wrote this, some sponsors expressed concern verbally that “degradable pick-up mitt” phrasing on Mutt Mitt stations might be confusing for users and lead to improper disposal of pet waste.

Mutt Mitt Station Users

Survey responses tended to be from women, with the 36-50 year old age range being under-represented (though it is possible that this matches the pattern for park use.)

- **All respondents reported picking up after their dog;** 93% said they “always” pick up after their dog and 6% said the “often” pick up after their dog (a lone respondent said their dog had never pooped at the park). However, use of the Mutt Mitt stations was variable. This may indicate a large percentage of people who bring their own bags.

Table 1 - Reasons for not picking up after pet	
%	Response
23%	Unprepared/no bag
17%	Dog pooped in an area where people wouldn't walk
5%	Dog was sick
54%	N/A - always pick it up

Even the Most Dedicated Scoopers May Not Always Pick Up - Despite the fact that most reported that they “always” pick up, in a follow up question where we asked why they might not have picked up after their pet in the past, respondents offered some reasons why they might not pick up on occasion (see Table 1). This question is particularly interesting. There have been complaints (sometimes vehement in nature) about the pickup rates at some parks. This question reveals that even the most dedicated scoopers may not always be able to follow through and thus may contribute to at least some of the waste being left at parks. This is also interesting in light of research conducted in Snohomish County in 2005 that indicates that most people thought negatively of those that don't pick up after their pets, assuming that the primary reasons for not doing so was that others were “lazy”. This assumption was even more prevalent among those who reported “always” picking up after their pet.

People Want to See Pet Waste Disposed of Properly and Think That the Mutt Mitt Program Helps - All respondents felt that it was important for pet owners to pick up after their pet *and* put it in the trash (83% said it was “extremely important” and 17% said it was “very important”). In addition, most respondents said that they thought that the Mutt Mitt program has a major effect on reducing the amount of pet waste left on the ground.

Users Have Positive Feelings About Mutt Mitt Program, Even if They’re Unsure if Pet Waste Pickup Rates Have Improved - When people were asked if rates of pet waste pickup have improved at their park over the last two or three years, there was no clear consensus. Thirty five percent of respondents thought people were picking up more, 12% thought people were picking up less, 17% felt it was about the same, and 26% didn’t know. There are a number of conclusions that could be drawn from the disparity between this question and the previous one about the effect of the Mutt Mitt program. People’s positive response about the effect of the program may indicate that they like the program, even if they’re not sure that they’ve seen pickup rates improve at their local park. **Increase Park Use May Lead to Perception that Pickup Rates Have Not Improved.** In any population, there is a fairly steady

percentage of people who will not follow best management practices, thus increased park use would lead to more pet waste left on the ground. The number of bags provided to Clear Creek has increased precipitously since the program began in 2007, providing some support to the idea that park use may have increased (see Table 3).

Table 2 - Number of bags provided by year to Clear Creek Trail

Year	Bags used
2007	1,600
2009	2,000
2010	10,000
2011	20,000
2012	36,100
2013	62,000
2014	60,000

“We use the Mitt stations, but feel they should be accompanied by trash cans.” - Mutt Mitt User

Users Would Like More Waste Receptacles - The final question on the survey was an open-ended question asking for any other comments or

suggestions for improving the program. Responses were then categorized (see Table 3). The most common suggestion for improving the program was to have more trash cans available. Of those that asked for more trash cans, most responses (73%) came from Clear Creek. It is interesting that while many Mutt Mitt users wanted more places to dispose of their pet waste, this was not a common request among sponsors.

Table 3 - Open-ended comments and suggestions

#	Response
15	More trash cans
11	General praise
5	More stations in more locations
5	Other ideas for improving compliance
5	Comments about the park or its upkeep

Discussion/Conclusion

Sponsors and Users Represent Different Audiences - In comparing responses from users and sponsors, it appears that these are two different audiences. While we did not ask a specific question about why people pick up after their pets, the common theme in interacting with interviewees was that they picked up after their dogs as a courtesy to others, so no one would step in it, not as a means to achieve improvement in local water quality. By contrast, the most popular reason for sponsoring a station was to help reduce impact on local water quality. Messaging and outreach to these two groups should be done

separately with an eye to their different motivations. More exploration into the motivations of users may prove helpful.

Waste Disposal a Barrier for Both Sponsors and Users - The disparity between the number of requests for more waste bins between sponsors and users is also insightful, and perhaps indicative of barriers for both groups. For users, it would appear they are unwilling to carry bags filled with their pet's waste very far. The large body of research devoted to littering indicates that convenience is a huge factor in whether people choose to litter. It stands to reason that picking up pet waste follows similar behavior patterns. However, the fact that sponsors did not make a similar request (despite frustration among some that pickup rates aren't better) may indicate that the cost and effort of removing garbage from the waste bins is a barrier. This is supported by a number of personal communications from sponsors regarding the cost and effort of maintaining a waste bin.

Based on the results of this survey, the following recommendations are made.

- To improve pick up rates:
 - **Make pet waste disposal more convenient** by providing more waste bins and providing clip-on bag dispensers. Partner with volunteers at high-use parks to distribute dispensers.
 - **Eliminate confusing wording** (“degradable pick-up mitt”) with stickers identifying the correct action (“scoop it, bag it, trash it”) to help users understand how to dispose of pet waste.
 - Explore ways to **incentivize pet waste disposal**, such as giving dog treats when people throw away dog waste.
- To make sponsorship easier and aid current sponsors:
 - Work with sponsors to find ways to **make emptying waste bins more convenient**.
 - Work with Waste Management to **assess feasibility of discounted or pro bono garbage pick-up** at Clear Creek.
 - Explore ways to **reduce price of Mutt Mitt sponsorship**, including finding less expensive bags, providing more bags to more sponsors, and sharing cost-saving techniques with sponsors when they are contacted for annual reporting.
 - Work directly with sponsors as needed to **set reasonable expectations for the program's success** and help them understand the importance of their work in creating social norms.
- To increase sponsorship:
 - **Increase visibility of program** through ads and articles, emphasizing the program's success, the hard work of volunteers, and ways to become involved.
 - **Continue to promote program to recruit new station sponsors.**

These recommendations are meant to help improve pick-up rates, encourage and aid existing sponsors, and recruit new sponsors to the program.

“Good program. Keep it going!” – Mutt Mitt User

Appendix A

Introduction: We are contacting you because our records indicate that you signed up to sponsor a Mutt Mitt station. First of all, thank you for participating in this program! We have a few short questions to help us improve our program and determine its impact. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey. Respondents will be eligible to receive a free green cleaning kit, valued at \$15 or a batch of Mutt Mitt bags of similar value (200 bags). Please submit responses by Sept. 22nd. If you are no longer the person responsible for maintaining the Mutt Mitt station, please notify Cammy Mills (cmills@co.kitsap.wa.us).

1. How long have you been a Mutt Mitt sponsor?
 - a. Less than a year
 - b. 1-3 years
 - c. 4-5 years
 - d. More than 5 years

2. How many stations do you sponsor?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4 or more

3. What was the main reason you decided to become a Mutt Mitt sponsor? (Choose one.)
 - a. Help make the area more child friendly
 - b. Help reduce impacts on local water quality
 - c. Help make the area friendly to both dog and non-dog owners
 - d. Help support educating dog owners about what to do with pet waste
 - e. Sponsored station in response to resident/neighbor complaints about pet waste
 - f. Other – please specify

4. About how often do you frequent the area(s) where you sponsor a station(s)? If you sponsor more than 1 station, your response should reflect a visit to any one of the stations.
 - a. 3 or more times a week
 - b. 1 to 2 times a week
 - c. 1 to 3 times a month
 - d. Less than once a month
 - e. Once every 2-4 months
 - f. A few times a year

5. What effect do you think the Mutt Mitt stations has had on reducing the amount pet waste left on the ground in the areas you are familiar with?
 - a. Major effect
 - b. Moderate effect

- c. Minor effect
 - d. No effect
 - e. Don't know
6. How likely are you to continue sponsoring the Mutt Mitt station(s)?
- a. Extremely likely (skip to 8)
 - b. Very likely (skip to 8)
 - c. Neither likely nor unlikely (skip to 8)
 - d. Not very likely (proceed to 7)
 - e. Not at all likely (proceed to 7)
7. What is the main reason you are not likely to continue sponsoring the Mutt Mitt station?
(Choose one)
- a. Too much work stocking the bags
 - b. Too much work dealing with the garbage
 - c. Moving away
 - d. Too much expense
8. Would you be interested in joining an online group for Mutt Mitt station sponsors on Facebook or other social media? This could be a venue to share successes and challenges and to let us and others know of safety concerns (such as wasp nests in Mutt Mitt stations).
- a. Yes (If yes, proceed to 8a)
 - b. No (If no, skip to 9)
- 8a. Please leave us your email address so we can let about an online Mutt Mitt sponsor group.
9. Do you have any suggestions for how we could make the Mutt Mitt program more successful?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience sponsoring a Mutt Mitt station?
11. In order to be eligible to receive your green cleaning kit or supply of Mutt Mitt bags, we need a way to contact you. This is completely optional.

Email:

Phone:

Name:

Dog Walker Survey

We value your feedback and are constantly striving to make our programs better. Please take a few minutes to fill out this brief survey. Choose the answer that best applies for each. When you're done, you'll receive a special gift.



About how often do you walk your dog at this park?

- Almost daily
- 1 to 4 times a week
- 1 to 3 times a month
- Less than once a month

Of all the times you come here with your dog, about how frequently do you pick up the poop?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- NA - Dog has never pooped here

When you visit parks or other areas with your dog that have Mutt Mitt stations, about how frequently do you use the bags provided?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

On an occasion where you may not have picked up after your dog on a walk, what was the main reason?

- Unprepared/No Bag
- Dog pooped in an area where people wouldn't walk
- Dog was sick
- N/A – always pick it up

How important do you think it is for dog owners to pick up their pet waste *and* put it in a garbage can?

- Extremely important

- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

Compared to 2 or 3 years ago, would you say that dog owners are now picking up their pet waste more, less, or about the same *at this park*?

- Picking it up more
- Picking it up less
- About the same
- Don't know

If you witnessed somebody fail to pick up their dog's waste, would you feel comfortable asking them to do so?

- Yes, I've done it before
- Yes, I think so
- No
- Not sure

In the last 12 months, have you ever asked a *friend or acquaintance* to pick up after their dog waste?

- Yes
- No

In the last 12 months, have you ever asked *someone you don't know* to pick up after their dog waste?

- Yes
- No

What effect do you think the Mutt Mitt program and information about scooping the poop and putting it in the trash has had on reducing the amount of pet waste left on the ground in areas where you take your dog?

- Major effect
- Moderate effect
- Minor effect
- No effect
- Don't know

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your age?

- 18-35
- 36-50
- 51-64
- 65+

How long have you been a dog-owner?

- Less than 1 year

- 2 to 5 years
- More than 5 years

Do you have any comments or suggestions about the Mutt Mitt stations or pet waste?