



**Snohomish County**  
**Public Works**  
*Surface Water Management*

**Focus Groups:  
Dog Owners and  
Veterinarians**

# Dog Waste Management Communications Materials Testing

December 2005



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# Background

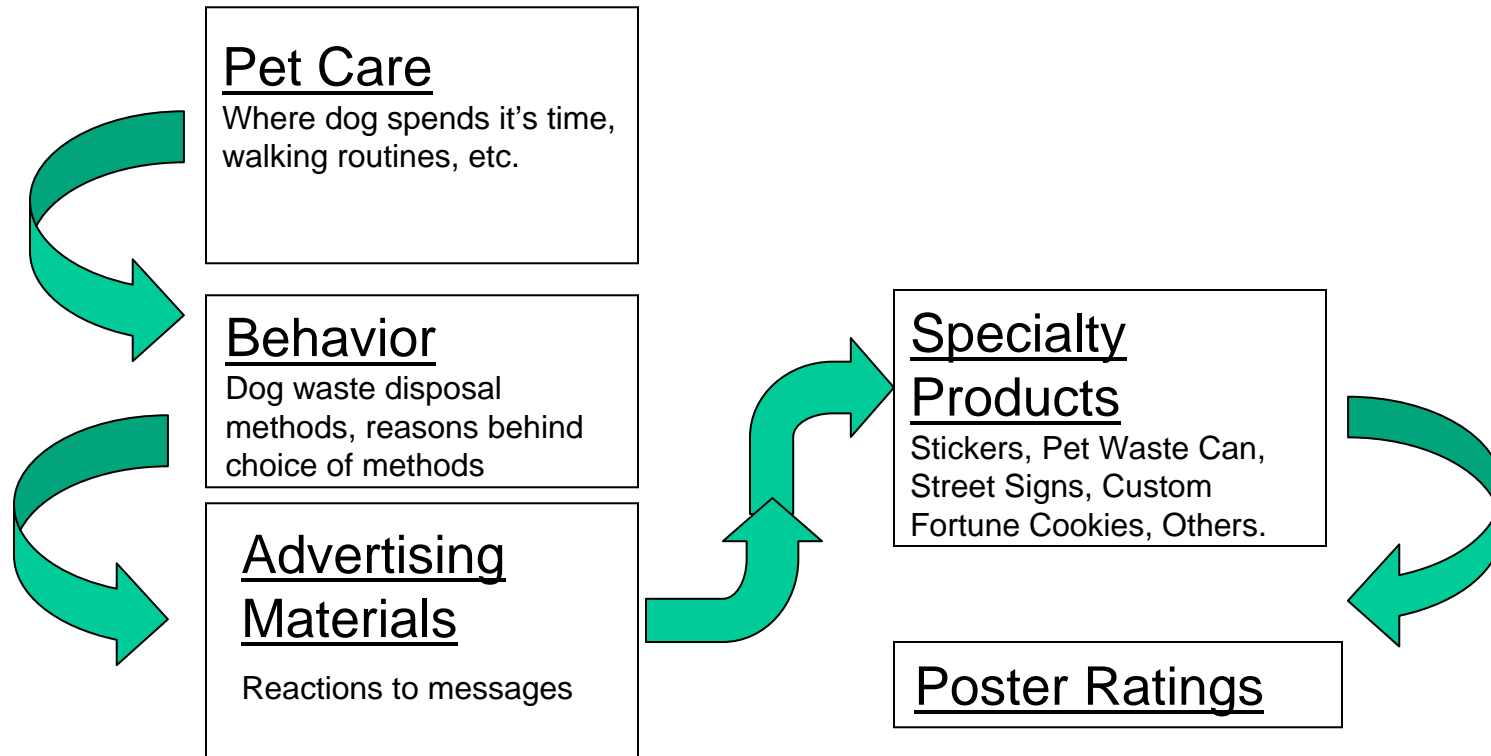
- ❖ This report is part of the second phase of a study conducted by Elway Research for Snohomish County Surface Water Management. The project was initiated in December, 2004, in order to reduce the amount fecal coliform bacteria from pet waste that was entering into the local watershed.
- ❖ The first phase of the research sought to determine the barriers to proper disposal of pet waste and to analyze how to motivate and support behavior changes in the area. The first phase included focus groups and a quantitative study. The results are available under separate cover.
- ❖ This report summarizes the results from two follow-up focus groups, one conducted with dog owners, and one with vets and vet technicians from the area.
  - **The main purpose of the dog-owner group was to show possible advertising messages concerning proper waste disposal and to gauge reactions.**
  - **The vets and technicians were also shown materials and asked for their reaction. In addition, they were queried as how the county should best seek the cooperation of veterinarians.**



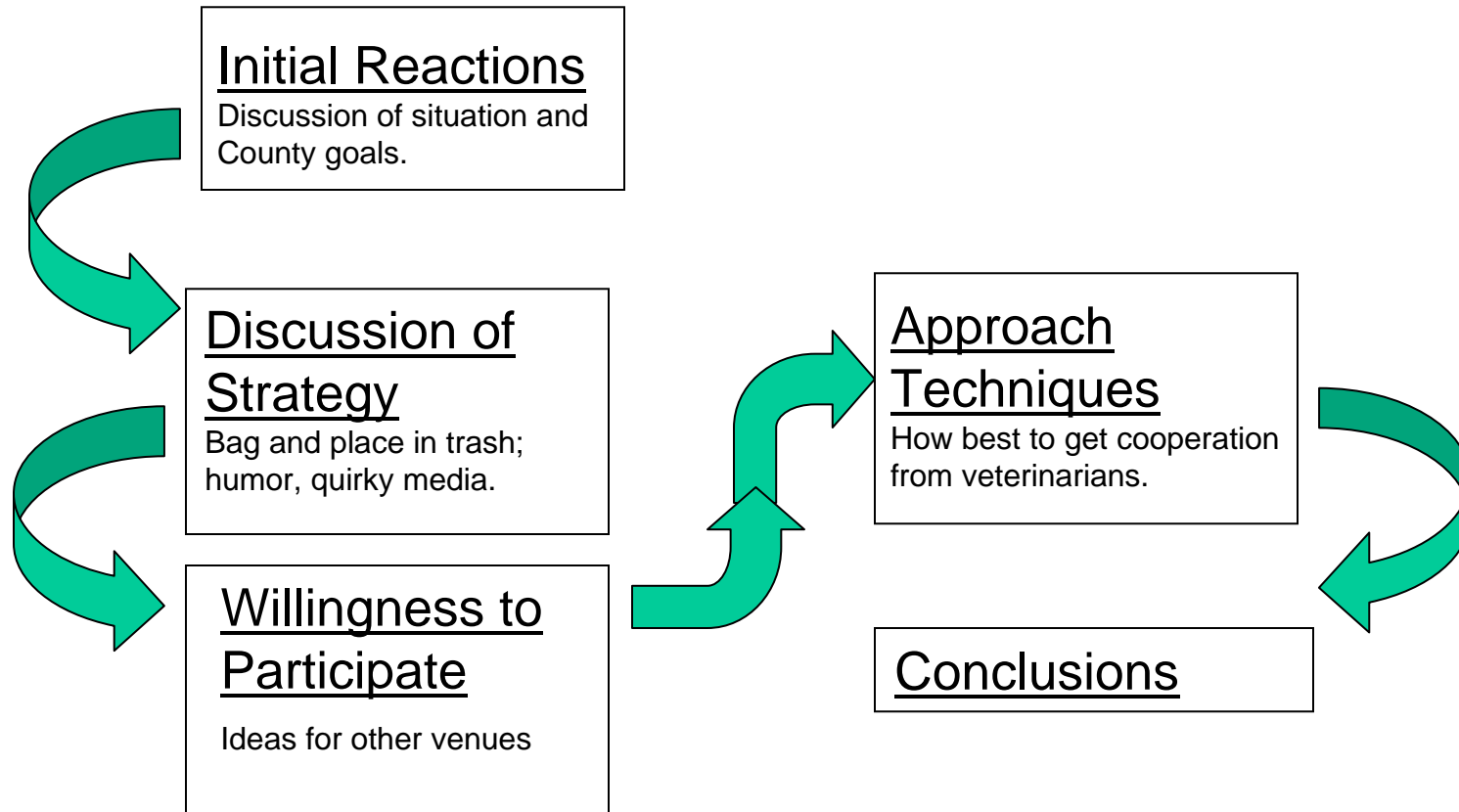
## Methodology – Second Phase

- ❖ **Two focus group discussions were conducted on Tuesday, December 6th (6:00 PM and 8:00 PM)**
- ❖ **The first group consisted of a cross-section of dog owners. They:**
  - Had lived in Snohomish County more than one year.
  - Were balanced to include a variety from different zip codes, types of housing, sizes and number of dogs, and dog-care habits.
- ❖ **The second group contained four veterinarians, and three vet technicians, all from different veterinarian clinics.**
- ❖ **The discussions were video and audio taped, and each lasted approximately 90 minutes.**
- ❖ **Respondents were paid \$50 for their participation.**
- ❖ **Both groups were moderated by Elway Research.**

# Discussion Flow – Dog Owners

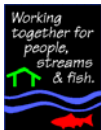


# Discussion Flow - Veterinarians





# Dog Owner Group Summary



## Participant Profile

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b># of Dogs</b>	<b>Dogs' Time</b>	<b>Quota*</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>In ½ Year, Out ½ Year</b>	<b>A/B</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Stay in House</b>	<b>B/B</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Run Free</b>	<b>B/A</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Stay in House</b>	<b>B/B</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Stay in House</b>	<b>B/A</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Stay in House</b>	<b>B/B</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Stay in House</b>	<b>B/A</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Stay in House</b>	<b>B/B</b>

<b>*</b>	<b>A: Pick Up Frequently</b>	<b>B: Pick Up Infrequently</b>
<b>A: Plastic Bag + Trash</b>	<b>A/A</b>	<b>A/B</b>
<b>B: Any Other Disposal</b>	<b>B/A</b>	<b>B/B</b>



## A Dog's Typical Day

- ❖ **Respondents were asked where their dog typically spends the day, and how often the dogs are walked.**
  - Most described having big back yards, where the dogs could go out.
  - Few of the dogs got daily walks; several said that the dogs were exercised by “playing ball,” or that the dogs “run around” on their own.
  - Only one man described taking his dog on regular, long walks.
- ❖ **They currently get information on pet care from other dog owners, vets, breed magazines, pet stores, and “Google.”**

# Dog Waste Management

- ❖ **They tend to either bag and dispose of dog waste in the garbage, compost/bury it, and/or leave it on their own property, usually in a spot where “no one goes.”**

- *“They have one area, and it just kinda takes care of itself.”*
- *“I just fling it where no one walks. No one dare walks.”*

- ❖ **When on walks, they do usually pick up and bag the waste.**

- ❖ **Those that clean their own yard tend to leave the waste for up to a week or two.**

- *“The dog usually uses one area, and when we see that we can notice it, that means it’s time for us to get out there.”*
- *“I rake it, and it can be once a week, once every two weeks, depends on the time, but I pretty much get it composted.”*

## Reasons to Pick Up Dog Waste

- ❖ **When asked directly if there was a problem with leaving dog waste on the ground, the owners mentioned flies, that it kills the grass, and that one dog had caught roundworms from old waste.**
- ❖ **A couple had heard that dog waste was harmful to the environment; most had not:**
  - *“Poop’s poop to me, but (if) it’s dog poop, you don’t want to use that for compost. I don’t know why.”*
  - *“We have a seasonal creek, so we have to be conscious of where it is.”*
  - *“I didn’t know it was bad.”*

## Initial Reaction to Messages

- ❖ **The participants were shown different products, visuals and headlines, designed to promote the proper disposal of dog waste. All contained the final message “Scoop the poop, bag it, and place it in the trash.”**
  
- ❖ **In general, the messages were very educational. Most had not known about the harmfulness of dog waste.**
  - *“I really didn’t know that dog poop had the bad of stuff in it at all...I didn’t know the stuff lived.”*
  
- ❖ **They were also surprised to hear that they should bag the waste and put it in the garbage. (Even some who had been disposing of waste in the garbage thought that they really weren’t supposed to.)**
  - *“I always thought it was illegal.”*
  - *“I always wondered what you’re actually really supposed to do with dog waste.”*

## More Reaction to Message

- ❖ **They like the basic “Scoop the poop, bag it and place it in the trash” and “Clean Yards, Clean Streams, and Clean Shoes” messages.**
  - “126,000 dogs” was also effective.
    - *“That gets everybody thinking.”*
    - *“There’s nothing natural about 126,000 dogs in the neighborhoods.”*
  - Several wanted the tag lines even larger, or at top.
- ❖ **They prefer short messages to long ones.**
  - *“Keep it short, but just say ‘Trash is okay’ or ‘Trash is good’.”*
- ❖ **They feel that dog owners don’t have to be convinced, just notified.**
  - *“I feel that, if people were informed, they would take care of it.”*
  - *“Just straight to the facts. If you care about dogs, you’ll open it.”*

# How to Distribute Information

- ❖ **Participants on their own had the idea to educate dog owners via the veterinarians. The message could be simple:**
  - *“Do you know what to do with your dog poop? Throw it away.”*
- ❖ **Others suggested bumper stickers, billboards, bus signs, TV commercials, signs at dog parks, or offering a drawing for a substantial prize (free dog licensing for a year.)**
- ❖ **Many thought education should be through kids, with programs at schools, “take home” printed plastic bags, and labeled flash lights.**
- ❖ **Reaction was more negative to labeled water bottles, key tags, “trinkets,” and having to “send in for things” in general.**
  - *“I don’t want to drink water around talk about poop.”*
  - *“I say save their money.”*

## “Pooper Scooper” Stickers

### ❖ There were mixed responses to the stickers shown (“I’m a pooper scooper.”)

- They weren’t sure if it was meant to be placed on their garbage can or elsewhere more visible in the yard.
- There was confusion as to target of the message. Some thought the sanitation workers deserved to know if dog waste was in the garbage. Others felt that, if the sticker were large enough and visible, it would be educational to passers-by.
  - *“It sends the message: I’ve got permission now.”*
- A few found it inappropriate or didn’t like the design (they wanted it bigger and more “official looking.”) They didn’t like the “cutesy” look of the cartoon, but thought it should be more “to the point.”
  - *“Who needs to know?”*
  - *“I’m not crazy about this look so much.”*
  - *“If you really wanted to have a sticker, you’d have it more official looking.”*
  - *“You can just print the trash can ‘Bag Pet Waste Okay.’”*

# Special Dog Waste Bin

- ❖ **Reaction was fairly positive to the special dog waste collection bin, although not unanimously so:**
  - *“Well, cool. I would totally quit flinging my poop over the bank.”*
  - *“I’m always using bags, and that bothers me because I feel like I’m contributing to our landfills by double bagging every time.”*
  - *“I’m not opening that thing.”*
  - *“I’d probably just keep it in my 2-1/2 gallon bucket the way I’m doing it.”*
  
- ❖ **As in the initial focus groups, several were bothered by the use of plastic bags around the waste, because the plastic would stop degradation.**
  
- ❖ **Others understood the plastic bags to be for the protection of the waste collection workers.**



## Reaction to Fortune Cookies

### ❖ **Most participants liked the fortune cookies, although “it depends on where they’re delivered.”**

- Vets offices and pet stores were suggested distribution points (pet stores might be more appropriate places for dog cookies instead).
- They liked the “cute” messages, but also the straight information, and fact that the website was included.
- **A couple were negative:**
  - *“I don’t know if you want to associate food with poop.”*
  - *“I would have to question investing money in this marketing concept...I don’t think I would eat it, and I’m not sure I’d let my kid eat it.”*

## Highest Poster Ratings

The participants were shown 14 posters with the “scoop it” message, and were asked to rate each from one to ten on effectiveness. The highest mean ratings recorded were:

**8.38 for #85 “It’s the American Way” (dogs in front of flag)**

- *“That is good. I like that.”*
- *“That’s very cool.”*

**8.29 for #11 “Dogs can’t flush” (dog sitting in human bathroom)**

- *“Now that’s cute.”*

**7.56 for #48 “Self portraits” (dog face drawn in poop on grass)**

- *“That’s funny.”*
- *“I would get that message.”*

**7.29 for #16 “Dog waste pollutes” (kid’s feet in stream)**

- *“That’s a cute one.”*
- *“Very understandable.”*

**7.00 for # 79 “Some things last longer than you think” (kid in grass)**

## Middle Poster Ratings

### **4.88 for #4: “Dogs don’t have opposable thumbs” (dog with pooper-scooper)**

- Many didn’t recognize the scooping tool, and/or thought others wouldn’t know it.
- It was also questionable whether the public knew about “opposable thumbs.”
- Some liked the dog, others thought “the dog doesn’t look guilty enough.”

### **4.75 for # 56: “Walk barefoot with confidence” (kids feet in grass)**

- The point was made that, if the visual was just a kid, the poster would have to say “scoop your dog’s poop.”

### **3.88 for # 7: “Fecal coliform bacteria machine” (puppy in grass).**

- The term “fecal coliform” is too negative, and not understood.
- It “perpetuates” puppies; people are being encouraged to adopt older dogs.

## Lowest Poster Ratings

### **3.56 for #46: “You’ll be amazed what your dog can do” (poop with embossed smiley face)**

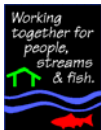
- *“That has a smile. It’s not so offensive this way. It’s actually kind of funny.”*
- *“I guess I just don’t want to see those plastered around my neighborhood.”*

### **3.00 for #10: “Clean yards, clean streams” (huge pile in grass)**

- *“I’m going to look the other way. I’m not going to linger on that.”*
- *“It catches your attention, but then you’re put off by it.”*

### **2.50 for #94: “Poop Noir” (dog with poop, on black background)**

- *“That dog looks abused. I don’t like it.”*
- *“That looks more like a ‘feed me’ campaign.”*
- *“You have to use the right dog to get the right appeal.”*



## Ratings For Each

POSTER	SCORES								MEAN
It's the American Way	5	5	6	8	9	10	10	10	8.38
Dogs Can't Flush	-	5	8	8	8	9	9	10	8.29
Self Portraits	3	5	6	9	9	9	10	10	7.56
Dog Waste Pollutes	-	4	5	6	8	9	9	10	7.29
Some Things Last Longer Than You Think	6	6	6	6	7	7	8	10	7.00
Dogs Don't Have Opposable Thumbs	2	4	4	4	4	6	6	9	4.88
Walk Barefoot With Confidence	2	3	4	4	5	5	7	8	4.75
Fecal Coliform Bacteria Machine	1	2	3	4	4	4	5	8	3.88
You'll Be Amazed What Your Dog Can Do	0	1	3	4	4	4	6	7	3.56
Clean Yards, Clean Streams	1	2	2	2	3	4	4	6	3.00
Poop Noir	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	2.50
<b>MAILINGS</b>									
"Elephant"	3	4	4	4	6	6	7	10	5.44
"Lasts Longer"	1	2	4	5	5	7	9	10	5.31
"Poem"	0	0	0	1	2	2	3	4	1.50



Snohomish County  
Surface Water Management  
Dog Owner Focus Groups

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# Veterinarian / Technicians' Group

## Problem Definition

- ❖ **The vets were supportive of the County objectives, but saw dog waste as mostly a nuisance (don't want to step on it; others leave it on their lawn).**
  - None mentioned disease or pollution hazards on their own.
  
- ❖ **They were only slightly more informed than the non-vet owners as to proper disposal.**
  - *“I pick up my dog's and I just kind of throw it.”*
  - *“I'm always wondering if I'm supposed to be doing that.”*
  - *“In the county right of way, they've got blackberries growing there, so it's fertilizer.”*
  
- ❖ **Several thought the solution was promoting use of better dog food, to insure less frequent, smaller, firmer stools.**

## Problem Definition, cont.

### ❖ They see promoting scooping and educating about proper disposal as separate issues:

- Failure to pick up waste is caused by not caring, or being (at least at times) lazy.
  - *“There has to be some way to guiltify...that population.”*
- However, they agree that most dog owners simply don't know about the potential hazards of the waste.
  - *“They're absolutely just floored at the concept that they could get something from the dogs.”*
  - *“If you want to make a real believer, let them see the microscope slide.”*



## Reaction to County Messages

- ❖ **The participants were introduced to the “Scoop the poop, bag it, and place it in the trash” messages, and shown many of the posters. Their initial reaction was positive. In general they liked:**
  - **The directness.**
    - *“I like the “place it in the trash” because they’re telling exactly what to do and there’s no ambiguous ‘Can I put it in the trash can?’.”*
  - **The statistics.**
    - *“Twenty-tons of dog waste...that’s a lot.”*
    - *“When you present statistics like that, all of a sudden it seems big.”*

# Favorite Posters

## ❖ Their favorite specific messages were:

- #11 (“Dogs Can’t Flush”)
- #16 (“Dog waste pollutes”)
  - *“That would be pretty effective.”*
- #21 (“It’s in the grass. It’s on my feet. It’s in the carpet. It’s everywhere.”)
  - *“That will get somebody’s attention right there.”*
- #26 (“Dog waste is not fertilizer.”)
- #43 (“Canine humiliation”)
  - *“Your dog doesn’t like running in the dirty backyard either.”*
  - *“It’s going to make you read the rest of it.”*
- #79 (“Some things last longer than you think”): They thought this visual would be even better with a dog poop in it, indicating that they missed the true point.



## Least Favorite Posters

### ❖ They were less positive about:

- **#7 (“Fecal coliform bacteria machine”)**
  - *“I think you’d lose a lot of people.”*
- **#10 (“Clean Yards, Clean Streams” with large poop picture.)**
  - *“I’m ready for the next one.”*

## Willingness to be Involved

- ❖ **The vets/technicians were told about potential stickers for trash cans, calendars, temporary tattoos, and fortune cookies, and were asked if their clinics would be suitable or effective messengers to disseminate the materials to dog owners:**
  - The positive responses included acknowledging that they are viewed as a reliable source of information.
    - *“Usually if people have questions, that’s where they’re going to go.”*
  - Others thought that pet owners might distrust that the vets were “in it for the money” somehow, or that pet clinics were immune to concerns about feces.
    - *“People actually think we like it.”*
  - One vet pointed out the dog owners who don’t bring their animals to the vet regularly are likely to be more of the problem. Others acknowledged that there are a lot of dogs they don’t see until they get sick.

## Willingness to be Involved (2)

- ❖ **The vets/technicians were not enthusiastic about being prime disseminators of information:**
  - There was consensus that clinics are already full of signs and notices, and that pet owners “just get overloaded.”
    - *“We get inundated with advertising.”*
    - *“ It gets so you really have to choose, are you putting up this poster this week.”*
  - They thought that only the larger clinics would have the staff time to be able to do more than just hang posters or have fortune cookies available.
    - *“Clinics with a lot of assistants that do the check-in, and...take the original questions, that would be the prime time.”*
- ❖ **Notably, though, several took posters at the end of the evening, to hang in their offices. The smaller posters were preferred.**
- ❖ **They definitely do not want individualized posters with their staff’s picture on it.**

## Other Venues/Campaign Aspects

❖ **The vets suggested multiple other venues, either as alternatives to their clinics, or in addition. These included:**

- A general public media campaign.
- Pamphlets or single sheets to put in with the “puppy packets.”
- Information with dog food.
- Signs at trail heads.
- Information at animal shelters, through animal control, and through Snohomish County Licensing.
- Seminars/assemblies at schools.
- At dog parks, with policing, to initiate the concept.
  - *“You’ve got someone there kind of overseeing it an making it something aware rather than just a sign that someone didn’t see.”*

# Priority Messages

## ❖ Many thought negative reinforcement would be necessary to maintain the desired behavior:

- *“(It’s) one more issue that you have to be aware of... You have to treat this like a misdemeanor or something.”*
- *“Drunk driving didn’t work until they started doing hefty, hefty fines.”*

## ❖ Others suggested that, to promote people to clean-up their own yards, the message should focus on:

- Kids (for those who have them) and
- Water run-off (“yellow storm drains”).
  - *“That’s a tough sell. You have to figure if somebody’s not uncomfortable with looking at it in their front yard, the dog crap, then you’re going to have an uphill battle.”*
  - *“The punch factor is going to be your kid is going to be the one who’s tromping around out there in the poop in your yard.”*
  - *“The posters are clever and they get your attention but they don’t make the connection” (between dog waste and run-off water).*

# Ways to Promote Vet Involvement

- ❖ **Several thought that the vets should be compensated for their time, if they were to work proper disposal of wastes into exam time, or puppy training.**

- *“The could use the byline ‘For Further Discussion, Ask Your Veterinarian.’ That would be good business for us to get people aware of the fact that we are concerned about public health as well as pet health.”*
- *“It’s kind of reality of business is part of us are in business to make money, so anything that promotes our business, we’re all for.”*

- ❖ **One suggested hiring a veterinarian/salesperson to visit all clinics, pet stores and manufacturers and promote the concept.**

- *“Do you have a grant from Bill Gates?”*
- *“Get somebody out of the profession to act as your core person here within the county. Someone who’s been around.” (Humor always helps.)*
- *“It takes a little bit of salesmanship...if you don’t sell them some sizzle it does not fly.”*



## Promote Vet Involvement (2)

- ❖ **Contact with professional organizations, such as the Snohomish County Veterinary Medical Association, the South Snohomish/King County Veterinary Association, and the state association.**
- ❖ **Offer lunch seminars. This is usually set up with the receptionist or office manager as a cold call (mailings don't help).**
  - *“They feed you, and because everybody shows up for that...they talk to you later and we're in a more receptive mood from eating.”*
  - *“I'm inundated with people coming in with things to promote and sell...the ones I do are the ones that are going to feed my staff.”*
- ❖ **Have the lunch or a separate seminar count as a continuing education credit.**
  - *“Another great incentive to get people onboard.”*
  - *“It's a lot easier to take a lunch hour and get an hour's worth of tips, compared to pick up and go to Western State for it.”*

# Reaching the Hardest Customers

- ❖ **Time was spent discussing how to educate the hardest-to-reach dog owners. They are far less likely to come into the vet clinic. They also tend to buy their dog's food in grocery stores.**
  - *“The people that the dogs aren't part of the family, I think. Backyard dogs.”*
  - *“Young males with pit bulls...It's just not cool to go out and scoop the dog doo.”*
  - *“They're also the ones that aren't vaccinated or anything else.”*
  - *“(There's) a percentage of people down there that you're just not going to reach.”*
- ❖ **There are also families that mean well, but can't afford to come to the vet regularly or to buy pet-store dog food.**
  - These owners would be better reached at stores that sell voluntary tags (Fred Meyer/Wal-Mart) than through official pet licensing (most aren't licensed).

# Positive Vs. Negative Reinforcement

## ❖ The discussion kept returning to the need for positive versus negative reinforcement.

- Multiple examples were given of public problems that were solved only by strong penalties (drunk driving, the recent campaign to get pets licensed).
- Others pointed out how difficult it would be to enforce proper pet waste pick-up and disposal.
  - *“It’s going to be like enforcing the no-smoking law. Who’s going to do it.”*
  - *“I think you’re better off to go with positive incentives, trying to get people motivated to do it. Give them whatever they need as far as the parasite information...but make sure that the push is very educational.”*
- One woman suggested a surcharge on garbage pick-up to pay for cleaning streams. Those with stickers that they properly dispose of waste (or don’t have any) would avoid the tax.
  - *“A financial incentive is never a bad thing, either.”*
  - *“You want to get public attention, make something that somebody’s mad about.”*

## Discussion

- ❖ **The County’s materials were, overall, very well-received. Both groups found them educational.**
  - They particularly liked the statistics, and clear message: “Scoop the poop, bag it, and put it in the trash”.
  - The less-graphic messages were better received, and either positive-looking dogs’ or kids’ visuals preferred.
- ❖ **The dog owners think that the vet’s office is a perfect place for the posters. The vets and technicians voiced several concerns over being involved.**
  - They are inundated with sales calls and informational materials.
  - Their time might need to be compensated, either with pro-vet PR messages, free food, or continuing education credits.
- ❖ **“Trinkets” were less successful, as was direct mail. Dog owners did like the collection bucket.**



## Discussion, continued

- ❖ **The preferred messages are disease prevention and clean streams. The use of kids is very effective only for those who have children.**
- ❖ **The dog owners think that the issue is mostly educational – if other dog owner are told about the dangers of dog waste, and what is proper disposal, they will comply.**
- ❖ **The vets acknowledge that there are certain dog owners that will never be reached. They are not responsible, and infrequently visit the vet or pet stores. They may need to be reached at stores which stock more inexpensive pet supplies.**