

## Information Sheet Number 9

### Dogs on Play Areas

---

#### The problem

Dogs on children's playgrounds represent a major health and injury hazard:

- over 350,000 tons of excrement is deposited each year
- over 100 people, mainly children, have eye diseases caught by swallowing the *Toxocara* egg each year. This is caused by the parasitic roundworm in dog faeces
- There is evidence that dogs also carry e.coli and hepatitis in their faeces.
- 1600 children are taken to hospital casualty departments with dog bites

#### The law

There is no national legislation which requires people to ensure that their dogs do not foul children's playgrounds or run loose on them. There is legislation which requires owners to control dangerous dogs and local authorities to clear up the mess (the Environmental Protection Act 1990).

Local authorities can also pass Byelaws to control the access and behaviour of dog owners on children's playgrounds.

#### Byelaws

Byelaws have to be approved by the Department of the Environment and, as a general principle, it appears permission will only be given if:

- there is an easily identifiable area to be controlled
- there are alternative places for dogs to be exercised

Byelaws have limited effectiveness unless they can be implemented - and, in the last resort, dog owners prosecuted. See *Making Byelaws: A Guide for Parish, Town and Community Councils*, Department of the Environment 1996



## Protecting children and play areas

There are a number of measures which can be taken to reduce the problems of dogs on playgrounds before considering design solutions:

- provide a fenced exercise area for dogs
- require dogs to be on a lead in parks and recreation fields
- provide poop-scoops and containers
- empty them regularly
- request owners to remove faeces
- provide clear signs
- develop publicity and education programmes

## Designing the play area

There are a number of design solutions to dog fouling and dog attacks:

- fencing
- self-closing gates or dog-grids
- provide clear signs banning dogs
- provide a catch for leads on the outside of the fence

## Maintaining the play area

Removing dog faeces from the play ground is an unpleasant task for maintenance and cleansing staff. Some loose-fill surfaces in housing areas will also attract cats which can also spread diseases in their droppings. In some areas fox and

sheep droppings may be a problem. Operators should:

- check the playground regularly, preferably daily
- remove any faeces
- have an approved system for collection and disposal
- A leaflet on chemicals on playgrounds is available.

## Guide dogs

Guide dogs for the visually impaired are generally excluded from this advice.

