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DOG OWNERS ASKED TO CLEAN UP AFTER PETS//NEW ORDINANCE TACKLES PROBLEM OF UNCLAIMED CANINE DROPPINGS

Over the next few weeks, Forest Lake pet owners will be getting a clear message from city leaders: Your dogs aren't leaving a lot to be desired in this town.

Trying to curb the number of doggie mines on sidewalks, yards and trails, city officials soon will put up signs telling owners to clean up after their pets. Failure to bag the stuff risks a fine or public service.

"I believe most people are responsible, but there are some out there who aren't," Mayor Terry Smith said.

The city recently drew up the ordinance after some residents told Smith their neighbors weren't cleaning up after Fido -- while the mayor said he also has found droppings at the foot of his driveway. (No, it wasn't a political message. He said he wasn't mayor at the time.)

After looking into the matter, Smith said, he was surprised to find the town had no law against it.

So, here's the poop:

The owner of a dog that makes a mess -- or the person handling the dog at the time -- is responsible for cleaning up and disposing of the waste in a sanitary manner.

Those caught not doing so will pay a \$10 fine or spend five hours cleaning up dog waste on public property. Additional violations could mean fines of \$25 to \$50.

Rural areas and agricultural property are exempt.

The rules are mainly for those whose dogs do their thing on public land and in others' yards. But they also affect pets in their owners' yards.

Council Member Rick Ashbach said residents won't have to rush out immediately with little baggies after their dogs relieve themselves on their property. But he would like owners to clean up after a reasonable amount of time.

"I appreciate the fact that you should have a clean yard and not have accumulation," he told the council Monday.

Smith -- who owns a 45-pound Hungarian pointer -- told Ashbach -- who has two Jack Russell terriers -- that cleaning up should be no problem for "everyone who has little dogs like yours -- not big dogs like mine."

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