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**D.A.W.G.**

DOG ADVISORY WORK GROUP

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**DFA (Dog Friendly Area) Surfacing - Research Summary:**

Based on our ongoing research, we continue to conclude that there is no **PERFECT** surface solution for Chicago area DFA's. And although there is a wide-range of opinions, priorities and concerns, we believe that surfacing considerations should be addressed as follows:

***What's best for the greater good of the majority of park users, and what's reasonably best for most animals.***

DFAs are NOT the sole "be-all/ end-all" solution in addressing a dog's needs for exercise, recreation and socialization in a controlled environment. These separate areas have traditionally been established as a proactive way to address community conflicts and concerns, and as a compromise in alleviating pressure and social stress among competing recreational needs. Ultimately, dog guardians are responsible for overseeing any environment that they use, and should ideally cross-train and exercise their dogs in various environments to meet these specific needs.

According to D.A.W.G. (and "Wiggly Field") Advisors **Sue Ferraro, DVM**, Lincoln Park Dog & Cat Clinic, and **Rae Ann Van Pelt, DVM**, Family Pet Animal Hospital, the CVMA (Chicago Veterinary Medical Association), as an organization, will not dictate or recommend ONE specific, preferred surface; each vet has their own preferences and will give their own recommendations. But based on all factors which must be considered when addressing DFA surfaces, both Dr. Ferraro and Dr. Van Pelt (along with *their* advisors) agree that **hard-surfacing** (asphalt or concrete) is currently the most desirable solution in our Chicago DFA's.

We further recommend that this hard ("Runner's") Asphalt surface be "coated" with a layer of lighter paint, which is necessary to deflect heat, especially during the summer months (otherwise the area will heat up quickly and not be safe or comfortable for humans or dogs). This surface should be "Power-Washed" (high-pressure water cleaning) a minimum of four times per year. In addition, DFA's should also have separate "elimination" areas, which could contain pea-gravel. Since these are smaller, contained areas within the DFA, they are easier to maintain and clean. Appropriate drainage **MUST** be provided in pea-gravelled areas, and the area must be raked and disinfected on a regular basis. In addition, the gravel must be *completely* removed and replaced regularly. *\*Sponsoring Dog Guardian Groups should have a local veterinarian conduct quarterly soil (pea-gravel) sample tests, to check for parasites/contamination.*

**Surfacing ISSUES/CONCERNS:**

Chicago's approach in addressing DFA's is unique; We are at the forefront in addressing health issues and concerns-

**PRIORITY: Infectious Disease Control; PREVENTION of Parasite transmission**

1) **Health and Safety to Humans**      2) **Health and Safety to Dogs**

**Other considerations** (no particular order - all are important):

- **Initial cost and labor**      • **Ongoing, long-term maintenance**      • **Volunteer commitment, maintenance**
- **Chicago's climate/weather conditions**      • **Small size of areas** (most Chicago DFA's are under 1/2 acre in size).
- **Usage** (most of our DFAs are heavily utilized; large numbers of dogs are regularly using these areas, many come from *outside* of the community).
- **Odor control** (especially during warmer months!)      • **Aesthetics**
- **DFAs are Public Spaces:**

Currently, there are no enforceable control methods to limit who, or how *many* dogs can be in these areas at any given time ("maximum capacity" limitations); we are incapable of *ensuring* that *all* dogs using these areas are in good health.

• **Physical Effects on dogs:**

**\*Osteoarthritis: Surfacing is not a primary contributing factor**

There are NUMEROUS factors that contribute to osteoarthritis: Genetics, weight management, skeletal confirmation, predisposition to joint/hip problems, other types of joint-jarring exercises and activities.

• **HARD RUNNING:** Ideally should be done on-leash, on grass.

• **Dogs' activities while at a DFA:** Most dogs are NOT running non-stop while in these areas:

("Run, stop, turn, watch, sniff, bark, run, chase, wrestle, stop, drink, eliminate, watch, sniff, run, stop, etc"!)



## **Surfaces Explored:**

### **•SOLID Hard Surfaces (Concrete or Asphalt):**

These surfaces are considered to be the most reliable for parasite and infectious disease control: Ideal because there is no place for parasite eggs to accumulate, and heat from the sun will help inactivate the ova, as well as bacteria and viruses. Surface can be cleaned and disinfected easily, and it DOESN'T hold odor if washed down regularly. This surface can (and should) be disinfected on a regular basis. Concerns regarding the effects on the dogs' feet/pads: Most of these dogs are "city dogs", who are exercised regularly on these "hard" surfaces (even walking to the DFA itself!), and in doing so, are less exposed to thorns and other fine sharp objects which can be found regularly in soil or gravel. A layer of lighter paint (or "coating"), along with hose/water access, can help make this surface usable year-round, even in the hot summer months. Concrete may be cost-prohibitive for most areas.

### **•Rubber Matting (Recycled tires/Poured rubber):**

Costly; extremely susceptible to heat: surface temperature can become so hot that it can burn. *Can* be used in areas that are shaded and have water access for hosing down regularly. Not suggested for entire surface areas where dogs will be eliminating on a regular basis. Should be considered for "exercise only" areas; valid concerns regarding "pooling" of urine and odor control. Limited options for thoroughly disinfecting these areas.

### **•Pea-Gravel:**

Fairly inexpensive for the gravel itself, but **MUST** have specific and costly drainage system built-in underneath the gravel. Even with drainage, there is often standing water, which is a source of water-borne diseases and parasites.

**Gravel MUST be replaced on a regular basis** (ongoing extensive labor), and **ODOR CONTROL is a MAJOR drawback.**

Pea-Gravel doesn't provide a sound, stable surface for exercising, and exposure to thorns and other fine sharp objects (which can be found regularly in soil or gravel) are a concern.

#### **\*Pea-Gravel can be used successfully in "elimination" areas within the DFA's:**

Since these are smaller, contained areas, they are MUCH easier to monitor, maintain and clean. Still, appropriate drainage **MUST** be provided in these areas, and the pea-gravel must be raked, cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis (usually done by park volunteers). In addition, the gravel must be *completely* removed and replaced regularly.

### **•Grass/Ground-Cover or Bare Ground:**

Due to the small size of DFA areas and the large numbers of dogs using these spaces on a regular basis, we have not found any landscaping solution that will survive the extensive "trampling" and effects of urine. Also, it's difficult to *completely* remove all traces of feces; NOT reliable for parasite and infectious disease control: Source for parasite eggs to accumulate, which remain viable in the soil for YEARS, even after the stool dissolves. Valid concerns regarding odor control.

### **•AstroTurf:**

Again, difficult to *completely* remove all traces of feces; NOT reliable for parasite and infectious disease control: Source for parasite eggs to accumulate, which remain viable in the soil for YEARS, even after the stool dissolves. Valid concerns regarding odor control, plus extremely flammable!

### **•Mulch:**

Extremely porous and harbors bacteria: **Totally unreliable for parasite and infectious disease control: Impossible to control odor in mulched areas.**

### **•Sand:**

Inappropriate for Chicago-area DFA's: **EXTENSIVE drainage required** to control odor, prevent surface "blow-off", and for reliable parasite and infectious disease control.

For the amount of sand required, it would be practically impossible to replace on a regular basis.

**•NOTE: A natural effective drainage system occurs on our beaches.**