

**PET**

# Boarding & Daycare

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**RELIGION,  
POLITICS AND  
DRAINS!**

**THE NOT-SO-SECRET  
SECRET TO  
A GREAT STAFF**

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# Religion, Politics... and Drains!

by Gregory Taylor



**W**e've all heard the old adage about avoiding the topic of religion or politics in polite company. For those of us who work in animal care facilities, we can add placement of kennel drains to this list!

People in animal care typically have very strong views on drains: front or back of a dog run, individual vs. trench drain, etc. Facility staff have such strongly held beliefs, because they work (i.e. clean) the runs every day, year after year.

This article explores the issue of kennel drains in an objective way, explaining the pros and cons of each choice... because there is no right or wrong answer. In fact, it is even possible to run a facility with no drains! The right answer depends on personal preferences, what operating factors are important to the owner or staff, and in some cases, what brand of equipment is used.

There are two main questions to answer on the subject of drains: front or back and individual or trench drain. The answers influence two of the main goals of any animal care facility: reducing cross-contamination and maximizing operating efficiency.

## Front vs. Back Drains

### Back Drains

Hard data does not exist, but a reasonable estimate is that approximately 70% of facilities are currently designed with drains in the back of the runs. This ratio was roughly reversed 20 years ago.

The advantages of a back drain appear obvious. We naturally want to hose away from ourselves toward the back of a kennel as we enter it, using the sides and back of the run as backstops to the water spray. Back drains eliminate the need to step over solid and liquid waste, reducing the chance for inadvertently tracking it to another run. Likewise, hoses are less likely to come into contact with the waste, as they will always be in a cleaned area behind the staff as they move into a run.

There are some disadvantages to back drains as well. If there is a problem with a drain, the dog must be relocated to another run while repairs are made. This

can create a problem if there are no spare runs available. It can also pose a risk to the staff if the dog is large and aggressive. Relocating an animal also often generates loud barking that can create an unfavorable ambiance for adoptions and staff and can put stress on the dogs.

Finally, drains in the back of a run are often viewed as "out of sight, out of mind." Debris or waste is in the back of an occupied kennel, under a drain cover or rest bench, can't be readily seen, and is therefore less likely to be cleaned. This results in odor or disease.

### Front Drains

Drains in the front of a run offer the advantage of access. If there is a blockage, the facility staff can work on the drain without any disruption to the actual dog run and its occupant.

There is also a philosophy that says it is better to pull rather than push waste

and water out of a dog run. Spraying toward the back of a run can create a situation where waste is vaporized by the water stream and pushed into every nook and cranny of a run, spreading smell or disease. Drains in the front promote a gentler cleaning, which can result in fewer odors or cross-contamination.

Drains in the front of a run are also more likely to be cleaned more thoroughly than those in the back of a run. With a drain in the front of a run, it is impossible to avoid seeing and cleaning the waste. You often have to step over it! It is the opposite of the "out of sight, out of mind" situation discussed before.

### Trench vs. Individual Drains

While trench drains are the most common type used in animal facilities, they are by no means the only type. Many facilities employ an individual drain for each run, which plumbs to a common sewer outlet. Like their location, trench or single drains come with their own pros and cons.

Humans long ago learned the benefits of removing sewage through pipes; it keeps disease from spreading. Yet we allow the old ways to survive with our pets.

### Trench Drains

Trench drains are easy to access if there are problems. By design, they are open culverts with removable grates or rest benches on top to catch detritus before entering. These covers are lifted up to get at the trench. There is nothing to clog the drain until it empties at the far end, and any foreign objects are easy to retrieve.

The problem with a trench drain is that it is a communal culvert and can quickly take on all the characteristics of an open, shared sewer. Humans long ago learned the benefits of removing sewage through pipes; it keeps disease from spreading. Yet we allow the old ways to survive with our pets. Many drain covers also have a flange that extends down and actually rests in the bottom of the trench in direct contact with feces and urine. These flanges can swiftly become dirty unless they are frequently cleaned. Sometimes the contamination isn't even visible to the eye... but it can be to the nose! Over time, this flange can also dig into the trench drain, resulting in cracks or worse.

There are advantages to a trench drain. If back-to-back runs are employed, one trench drain can serve two rows of kennels, providing a cost savings. If a rear trench drain is employed, it will be far away from visitors walking the aisles and is therefore more aesthetically pleasing, especially if concealed by a rest bench. Finally, some kennel equipment works best with rear trench drains due to the

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limitations of their designs.

A trench drain in the front of a bank of runs is often seen in animal shelters. The trench drain is sometimes even left open without a drain cover and uses epoxy floor coverings to provide a quality barrier above the concrete pad. This system may sound odd. Who would want to step over an uncovered drain to enter a run? It has some advantages. An open trench drain at the front of the runs forces staff to look at any waste and therefore clean it quicker, faster, and better. They

can't help but notice any issues and are likely to fix them immediately. It also saves money by not using drain covers.

### Individual Drains

Single drains come in all different diameters and materials, with stainless steel being the most common. These single drains have less area than trench drains to invite bacteria. The former is often only six inches in diameter; the latter is four to six inches wide but extends the entire length of the run.

The odds of bacteria build up and the accompanying smell are much greater with trench drains.

The disadvantages of single drains are the cost and potential to have more expensive plumbing repairs if required. The cost issue stems from having to lay more pipes – one for each run – than if a trench drain were utilized. PVC pipe also costs more than cutting and finishing a trench drain. It is also more difficult to access and unclog a pipe buried in concrete than a trench drain. In my experience, this concern is over emphasized. Anything that gets into a trench drain ultimately ends up going down a pipe at the end of the kennel bank, clogging the run as it would with a single drain. However, because single drains often have better grate covers, trench drains often end up with more

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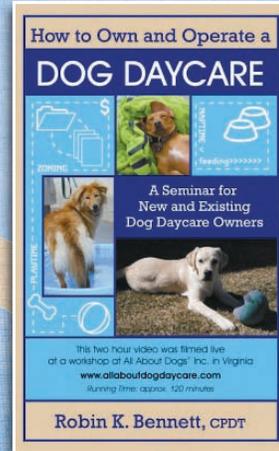
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blockages and calls to the plumber than single drains.

## Special Drain Designs

### No Drains

Another approach gaining popularity, primarily in boarding facilities, is not to use any drains. The theory behind this novel approach touches on an issue discussed earlier: bad smells. Odor is the kiss of death in a boarding facility. Customers want a clean-smelling building and will form a negative impression if it smells. Bad odors come from bacteria associated with waste. And where does the waste go? Drains! Any type of drain will have areas that are difficult to flush. These areas over time will gather some waste no matter how well they are cleaned. In time, this waste is likely to produce odors.

Without a drain, there is no area for the waste to hide and grow. Instead, staff cleans up the waste as soon as it is spotted, mops immediately, and applies a sanitizer. Periodically, the runs can be steam cleaned to kill any remaining bacteria; pressure washers are not used.

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Drains!

These pet resorts acknowledge there can be more labor involved than if cleaning with a pressure hose to a drain, but the tradeoff is better smell and less cross-contamination.

There are several other benefits to the no-drain approach. There is typically a water savings, resulting in lower utility bills. A lack of drains – and the accompanying sloped floors – can also make the building easier to qualify for

a loan. Banks need to think about any facility as collateral, and sloped floors and drains, especially trench drains, can result in the building being viewed as a special purpose facility that would be difficult to lease out again if repossessed.

There is no right or wrong answer to what type of drain to use or where it should be located in an animal facility. Any approach can work with the proper cleaning protocol and well-trained staff – even no drains! What is important is thinking through the issue and how your personal and professional desires and constraints will influence what design is best suited for you. ■

*Greg Taylor is the CEO of the Mason Company. Founded in 1892, Mason is the recognized leader in designing and manufacturing animal enclosures. Mason Company offers the broadest product line in the industry, including glass, stainless steel, galvanized steel and chain link gates, isolation panels in a variety of materials, fiberglass cages, accessories, and more for any animal application.*

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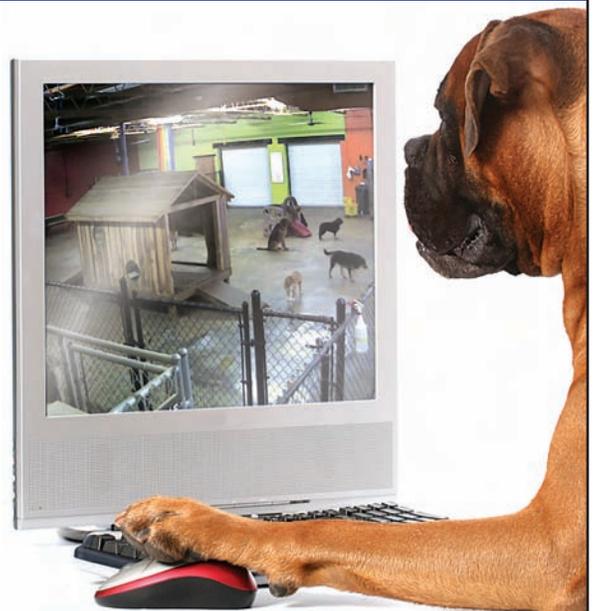
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