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A pile of cash for every pile of neglected poop.

If it works, the mayor and council of Airdrie may soon be hailed as dog-park miracle workers, with Calgary aldermen watching the experiment closely.

Well, perhaps not as closely as Calgarians watching their step, hoping to escape off-leash areas with shoes unsoiled by dog feces — but closely nonetheless.

"I like the higher fines because they act as more of a deterrent," said Calgary Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, after reviewing Airdrie's new dog control bylaw.

Airdrie's attempts to curb bad behaviour has resulted in Airdrie's city council pushing fierce new fines over the past couple of years in a bid to bite back at those who let mutts run roughshod over the rules.

The final draft of Airdrie's dog control bylaw passed last week, and the price for being a bad owner is of Great Dane proportions — making Calgary's penalties appear Chihuahuan by comparison.

For example, allowing a dog to run at large — a factor in many recent Calgary dog attacks — will now cost Airdrie owners \$500 for the first offence, \$1,000 for the second offence and \$1,500 for the third offence.

Before Airdrie council approved the change last Monday, the fine for running free was just \$100 for a first offence — the same as Calgary's current penalty.

And Airdrie is almost as harsh with dog owners who fail to scoop, post-poop: The fine is \$350 for the first offence, \$700 for the second and \$1,400 for the third infraction.

Calgary, meanwhile, charges \$150 and \$250 for leaving a brown landmine behind.

"It's only been in effect for a week so I'm not sure how popular it's going to be, but we've got challenges with our dog park and people picking up after their pets," said Airdrie Mayor Peter Brown.

"We have a lot of dogs in this city and the fines were older fines, and we decided they needed to be updated."

It remains to be seen if Airdrie's tough tactic will succeed, after warnings, education and common sense failed to keep the grass clear of dog doo.

The piles of neglect ruining Airdrie's off-leash areas are all too familiar to those walking delicately through Calgary's crowded dog parks — especially this spring.

A long season of snow and cold means the winter of discontent has given way to a spring of disgust, with those using the parks saying it's particularly nasty this year.

Candice Lee, spokeswoman for Friends of Riverpark, says she believes the filth found in that southwest Calgary off-leash area isn't the result of laziness, but owners who neglect to keep a close eye on their dogs.

"I don't think a lot of dog owners intend to leave it behind, but I do find the park dirtier than usual this year — and it's always dirtier after the weekend, when it's busy," said Lee.

The distractions are certainly a factor — an owner absorbed in a conversation, or a cellphone, can easily miss the mess dropped by their dog.

Lee says she has no issue with the kind of stiff fines passed by Airdrie, but first, she says Calgary should try more education so off-leash users really understand the rules.

"I have no problem with fines, but the first step they should take is education," she said.

Professional dog walker Elaine Bonnett agrees that owners try to obey the rules, but often they overlook what their dog is up to.

Rather than heavier fines, she says city bylaw officers should enforce the existing rules.

"I'm there every day and I've never once seen it being enforced," said Bonnett, owner of Rambling Rover.

And while Colley-Urquhart says she's keen to consider giving Calgary officers more bite with bigger fines, another alderman believes the current penalty is more than plenty.

"I'm reluctant to hammer people like that, with onerous fines," said Ald. John Mar, himself a dog owner.

"It's really difficult to enforce and I think it would more effective to educate — we need responsible owners."

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