

WATER PRECIOUS WATER

Water is a vital part of life and plays a significant role in the day to day lives of groomers. In fact, the days of mobile groomers are often dependent on the quantity of water in their tanks. Sometimes the day may revolve around whether there is enough water in their tank, or if there is sufficient storage to go through the day without making a stop to refill or dump. Water is a significant expense for a shop owner and over the year can add up. Are there actions we can take to maximize or change this?

Let's explore that thought by looking at the basis of what water is. It is a solvent or a carrier for our products. Water is necessary to remove product after the process is complete. Water typically runs a pH of 7 (which is neutral on the pH scale) and carries different levels of trace minerals. A key point is that not all water is created equal. Most public systems add chlorine and other substances that can quickly change the properties of the water. This change can lead to different results with products due to the elevated pH. Some water systems add enough chlorine that pH levels of 9 plus are possible, meaning there will be similar or worse effects than swimming in a chlorinated pool (normal pH 7.2-7.8). This imbalance will dry and irritate hair and skin, increasing the chance of potential infections.

The minerals in the water can also affect the bathing process because the shampoos do not differentiate the minerals in the water versus the dirt on the pet. If you have hard water, you may find you are using twice as much shampoo to get the same effect. This is one of the reasons it is difficult to compare products. One product may work better with your water system versus another based on the pH and the mineral content of the water. For example, if the product you use has a pH of 7.4 (within an acceptable range) and the water is 9.5 then that makes for a very alkaline final result. In contrast, if the pH of the shampoo is 4.9 (human level but below normal pet pH) with a water pH of 9.5, then the end results (pH level) will be almost neutral which may work very well. It should be noted that many products include buffers that help neutralize these extremes.

Minerals can be deposited on the hair from water with high mineral content. As a groomer you will observe a build up on the coat that feels chalky with the appearance of dander. Quite often, this hair will be heavy or weighed down. In spite of your efforts, the coat will still look very dull and the skin will be itchy and dry.



One thing to consider is the addition of a water softener, reverse osmosis, or purifying system to minimize the effects of water that may be out of balance. There are various types and they work differently, so I suggest researching and selecting a product that fits your specific needs. I often hear that these systems are too expensive. Expense is relative. If you run a moderately busy salon or have extremely harsh water, you may be using 2-3 times more product to compensate for the imbalance. When calculating those costs over a year or two, the investment in a system may save you money, not to mention being better on your hands and arms as well as the pets.

Since water is the solvent, we use it to move product and rinse the dog. The technique and ratio of dilution plays a huge role in the efficiency of this. Most professional products (not always true in pet store shampoos) are concentrated and require dilution. That dilution factor is usually unique for each product, so the suggested dilution ratio needs to be followed closely. If too concentrated the result may be very harsh and if the product is too diluted, then you may lessen the benefits. Generic discussions of how much to dilute products without addressing the individual products are irrelevant. The dilution is specific for the products.

This brings us to the side discussion of bathing and recirculation systems that use a standard dilution or recommend X amount of product to be used per X amount of water. Most of these systems are designed to use a specific product. If you use a different product, your dilution may be the similar to the suggested product, but the results may not. If you have a product that is designed for a 1-part shampoo with 3 parts water and you dilute it 1 to 50, do not expect the same results. Not that much different than cooking. If you are baking a cake and it calls for 1 cup of milk and you put in 10 cups, the results are going to be different.

Product application makes a significant difference. If water is the carrier and we put concentrated product on a dry coat, then it does not move. This in turn requires a lot more product to compensate for the lack of mobility. More time will be needed to rinse this excess product off. Wetting the pets in advance encourages the movement of the product and helps determine the correct product dilution. This is the area that bathing systems, recirculation systems, and the method of frothing shine. By breaking up the globules of product and mixing with water, it becomes more homogenous (equally distributed) which helps the product move through the coat and across the skin. This is especially important in the heavy coated breeds.

To achieve the best results in grooming a pet, it is especially important to understand the properties of water and the significant role that it plays. We must remember that the correct use of water is particularly important in the results that are ultimately achieved. By minimizing the harshness of water and diligently following the dilution factors of products, we not only minimize water use, but also product use. This collectively adds to our profit by decreasing product use, lowering our water bill, and possibly minimizing our stops as a mobile groomer.