

Prevention of Litter Box Problems

- 🐾 Have your cat spayed or neutered at six months of age. Sexually mature, intact cats frequently use urine and feces to mark their territory. Neutering will correct the elimination problems in 90% of these cats.
- 🐾 The rule of thumb for the number of litter boxes is: one per cat in the household, plus one. Extra litter boxes are necessary because some cats like to defecate in one and urinate in another. Sometimes others will not use a box that has already been used by another cat. Different areas for the litter boxes can prevent location-avoidance problems.
- 🐾 Clean the litter boxes DAILY. The single most common reason for a cat's refusal to use a litterbox is because the box is dirty. The box should be scooped daily, add fresh litter to top and keep depth of litter to about 3", and the litter changed and the box washed when soiled. The cheaper clumping litters that break-up easily will need to be dumped more frequently as the non-clumping litters. (Bacteria left in the litter box will smell to the cat even if you can't smell it.)
- 🐾 Choose a litter that appeals to the cat. Most cats prefer the texture of the sand-like clumping litters. Be sure to select a brand with no dust that clumps into a firm ball, making scooping easier and cleaner. As a health precaution for kittens that might be prone to ingest the litter, use a non-clumping litter until the kitten is under four months old.
- 🐾 NEVER use scented litter or litterbox deodorizers. Perfumed, chemical scents repel cats. When you wash the litter box, use hot water and a mild dishwashing liquid, rinse several times. Do not use harsh chemicals that will leave a lingering odor.
- 🐾 Do not use litter box liners—they can trap urine in-between the folds of liner and can be irritating to some cats. Also covered, or hooded litter boxes can be offensive to cats as they do not satisfy the cat's need for escape potential when eliminating. They also trap the odor inside, creating an "outhouse effect". The litter box should be uncovered and at least 24" x 18" =for an adult cat.
- 🐾 Place litter boxes in quiet, private places that are easily accessible to the cat and where they will not be disturbed by children or ambushed by other pets. Noisy areas near washing machines, furnaces, or under stairs, may frighten the cat away from the box. A house with several stories should have a litter box on each floor. NEVER place litter boxes near food and water dishes.
- 🐾 While kittens have a natural instinct to use a litter box easily seen, they may also choose other, more convenient locations if a litter box is not in site. You should limit their territory until they learn that the litter box is the only acceptable place to eliminate and they know where the box is located. Their tiny bladders are not under total control at this age and require frequent elimination. Praise and rewards will speed up the learning process. Like small children, when kittens are playing they get distracted and the urge to eliminate hits them quickly, they should not be expected to travel very far to find their bathroom areas, they won't make it.
- 🐾 When introducing a new cat into the home, confine the cat to one room with its litter box, bed, food, water and toys until the cat has used the litter box several times and shows an interest in exploring the rest of the house. Once you have decided on the placement for the litter boxes in your house. — Don't move them! (if they must be moved, do it slowly!)
- 🐾 Help your cat feel comfortable in his home territory. Play games with him, give him a massage, and talk to him frequently using their name. Give him positive and affectionate attention, LOVE them. A confident, secure, contented and relaxed cat does not need to relieve anxiety and stress by such extreme measures as urine or fecal marking. They will be willing to use their litter box.

What to do if Your Cat is Not Using the Litter Box

- 🐾 Have your cat examined by a veterinarian for a health problem even if there are no obvious symptoms (some problems can only be diagnosed through testing). Be sure to mention their urination and defecation habits. If a cat's elimination is painful, it may associate the litter box with pain and choose to eliminate elsewhere. This is the number one reason for litter box avoidance. When the cat is healthy again, a careful reintroduction to the box will be necessary. Retraining the cat to use the litter box will be necessary.
- 🐾 Carefully check the article on "Prevention of Litter Box Problems". Are you following all of the steps listed? Perhaps the solution is as easy as adding more litter boxes, cleaning more frequently, or changing the brand of litter. Try to accommodate kitty's preferences for location (by placing litter boxes where the "accidents" occurred) and add boxes whenever possible. Special consideration should be given to declawed cats as paw sensitivity may be the cause for litter box avoidance and kitty may require a box or tray without litter. Try shredded newspaper.
- 🐾 Never punish the cat for eliminating outside of its litter box. House soiling occurs when the litter box, its contents, or its location is offensive to the cat or when the cat is stressed by the environment. Punishment only increases the cat's stress and may worsen the problem. **HOUSE SOILING IS NEVER DONE TO SPITE THE OWNER!** The cat is trying to communicate to you something is wrong.
- 🐾 If a health issue or aversion to the litter box can be ruled out, consider that the problem could be anxiety related. Has there been a change in the household? Any intrusion on the cat's territory, whether human, animal, or even a new piece of furniture, can cause a cat to feel threatened, insecure, and stressed. This may result in his need to mark his territory. This is usually accomplished by spraying urine on vertical surfaces, or less frequently, by squatting and urinating or defecating on horizontal surfaces. The more cats in the household, the more likely that one or more of them will spray.
- 🐾 Try to relieve or eliminate the source of the cat's anxiety. (For example, pull the drapes so that kitty cannot view the antics of the tom cat next door.) If the environmental cause that triggers the territorial behavior cannot be identified or eliminated, consult with an experienced feline behavior counselor.
- 🐾 Whatever the cause of the inappropriate elimination, a brief confinement period may be necessary in order to clean the soiled areas, place deterrents in these spots, and to purchase more litter boxes or new litter. The confinement room should be comfortable and equipped with two litter boxes, fresh food and water (not near the litter boxes!) a bed and toys. They are not in cat jail, just being retrained. Visit them regularly, but don't let him out until the home environment has been cleaned and the litter box situation has improved. (Please note that extended periods of confinement may be detrimental to the retraining process.)
- 🐾 In order to thoroughly clean the urine soaked area an ultraviolet light may be used to identify the soiled areas. Then a strong enzymatic cleaner should be used to saturate and neutralize the area. To repel kitty from previously soiled areas, cover them with solid air fresheners (preferable a citrus scent) or a mini-motion detector (available from Radio Shack.) When the carpet is dry, a vinyl carpet runner (spike side up!) can be placed over the problem areas. Cats are very location oriented so deterrents should be left in place for at least six weeks after they have been using the litter box regularly to make sure that old habits have been broken and properly cleaned with no odor present.

Solving house soiling problems is possible with patience, persistence, and a systematic plan for retraining.