

# Is Your Cat Urinating Outside of the Litter Box?

## ❖ **How many cats do you have and how many boxes?**

- A good 'rule of thumb' is to have the same number of litter boxes as cats, **plus one**.
- If you have a multiple cat household, it is important to determine the house-soiling culprit. Once you know which cat is eliminating inappropriately, he/she can be monitored and medically assessed as needed.

## ❖ **How frequently do you scoop the box?**

- Dirty boxes make for unhappy cats! Leaving a box un-scooped is comparable to leaving your toilet repeatedly un-flushed! Keep it hygienic!
- You should be scooping/removing urine and feces from the box at least once to twice daily.
- Cats prefer to dig and deposit in a tidy and odor-friendly area.

## ❖ **How frequently do you change the litter and clean the box itself?**

- It is recommended to do a complete litter change weekly, clean the box itself at this time before replacing fresh litter.
- Be sure to maintain at least 3 inches of litter within the box, as most cats instinctually prefer to dig and bury. More litter also aids in easier scooping and eventual cleaning of the box itself.
- Soaking and scrubbing the box with a diluted dish detergent solution every few weeks will get the job done, be sure to rinse well and dry completely.

## ❖ **What type of box? Any changes?**

- Cats typically don't like change; they are creatures of habit and can be particular.
- Most cats prefer uncovered boxes; ideally, in area that has several escape routes.
- Covered boxes, or a secluded area with only one exit, with a tense multiple cat household may lead to harassment within the latrine. Such tension will cause a cat to avoid an area/litter box where it has been bullied, therefore, seeking other less than appropriate areas to eliminate.
- If you changed the type of box and the cat has begun eliminating elsewhere, i.e. switched from an uncovered to a covered box, take the cover off or offer both.

## ❖ **What type of litter? Any changes?**

- Most cats prefer unscented litter due to very sensitive olfactory senses and aversion to dusts.
- If you have changed the type of litter you were using and the cat eliminated outside the box, restore the old litter type. When switching, offer both the new and old litter in separate boxes; removing the old when the cat is using the new litter consistently.
- If any changes are to be made, a gradual transition is always recommended.

## ❖ **Where are the boxes located? Any change in location?**

- Changing the location of the litter box may upset the cat.
- Avoid placing litter boxes in high traffic or loud areas, cats prefer privacy and easy access...cats may avoid the box if there is too much going on or feel trapped.
- If a box must be relocated, do it gradually. Move the box a few feet towards the intended location every few days, until it has reached its final destination. If the cat begins to eliminate outside the box, move it back to the last location for a few more days.
- Ideally, litter boxes should be located in different parts of the home and/or on different levels, whenever possible.
- Placing a litter box in the area where a cat is eliminating is sometimes a simple solution.

## ❖ **Have there been any changes or additions in the home?**

- New people, pets, furniture, flooring, construction, even scents in the home can be a source of anxiety. Keep with routine as much as possible.

- Change in cat's diet and feeding times or locations and changes in your schedule (home more or less) can be emotionally disruptive.
- Moving into a new home can be over-stimulating and anxiety-inducing, it may just take time for your cat to settle; keep up with old routine as much as possible.
- Some cats "spray" (vertical urine marks) when attempting to establish their presence or in defense of territory. Both male and female cats can and will "spray".
- Some cats need the help of anti-anxiety medications, short or long-term therapy may be required. Discuss this option further with Dr. Burke.

❖ **Any tension or conflict among other pets in the house?**

- The house-soiling culprit may be being terrorized by other pets in the home, causing insecurity both in and out of the litter box. One or more cats "bullying" another cat is a typical conflict scenario. Litter boxes should be easily accessed with many escape routes to prevent aversion to the box location if a multi-cat household is less than harmonious.
- The "bully" and the "victim" may need to be separated, with behavioral modification techniques and positive interactions attempted.
- Even the stress of conflict in the house may lead a more passive, insecure cat (who's not being terrorized) to urinate outside the box.
- Some cats need the help of anti-anxiety medications, short or long-term therapy may be required. Discuss this option further with Dr. Burke.

❖ **Could there be any disturbances outside the home?**

- Outdoor and/or feral cats can be upsetting, both visually and through scent; urine is a primary form of communication among cats. Retaliation by your cat indoors may result as urine "spraying".
- Outdoor cats can be urinating around the parameters of the home, finding ways to discourage them is imperative in curbing your cat's house-soiling. Decrease access to potential resources, i.e. outside food, preferable latrine areas, etc.
  - Motion activated sensor device/sprinkle to deter critters (ex: Scarecrow Motion-Activated Animal Deterrent<sup>®</sup>).
  - Mothballs stuffed in pantyhose, hidden and secured along the perimeter of the home or areas where outdoor cats are known to eliminate has proven to be effective. Replace every couple of months.
  - Chicken fencing laid flat and hidden in grasses/mulches along perimeter or within flowerbeds, an aversive texture to most cats digging to eliminate.
  - Least appealing option, fox urine dribbled along the perimeter where critters venture...once they no longer find the area appealing you can discontinue use!

❖ **Cats that engage in house-soiling often develop preferences for surfaces or locations**

- Thoroughly cleaning and **neutralizing** the area is crucial!
  - There are many products available over the counter (Ceva Urine Away!<sup>®</sup> and Enzo Magic<sup>®</sup> through Crandall Worthington are anecdotal treasures) but a 50/50 solution of white vinegar and water or "de-skunking formulas" found online, may be just as effective. **No** ammonia.

❖ **Some other ideas to help deter inappropriate elimination:**

- 'Out with the old, in with the new'... start fresh with brand new litter boxes (ideally wide, uncovered boxes with unscented litter)
  - Keep the old box for an undetermined period, allowing the cat to choose; once the cat prefers to use the new setup, remove the old
- Feeding and engaging the cat in play in previously soiled areas
  - Cats do not typically like soiling where they eat or play. Feeding small, "special" meals, tossing treats or sprinkling catnip in the areas.

- **Feliway**<sup>®</sup>, a synthetic pheromone that initiates a feeling of well-being; can be purchased as a spray, plug-in room diffuser or infused collar.
  - Place Feliway Classic<sup>®</sup> diffuser in areas where marking is occurring (do not place in preferred latrine area)
  - Use Feliway Multi-Cat<sup>®</sup> for tension between housemates
- Restricting access to previously soiled areas when and if possible (closing doors, picking up rugs, etc.)
- Aversion therapy : making the area undesirable for the cat
  - **Proper neutralization** of soiled areas, using enzymatic products
  - Cover the soiled area with aluminum foil (a surface most cats avoid)
  - Citrus/lemon scented sprays or fresheners in areas (lemon rinds in houseplants)
- Cat attractant litter (continue to offer the previous type of litter and box as well)
  - Claims to consist of the perfect particle size and texture, with a herbal “outdoorsy” scent

❖ **If there does not seem to be an environmental source as discussed above, seeking medical attention is recommended.**

- A urine sample can be examined for the presence of infection, inflammation or crystals. These conditions can be uncomfortable, causing cats to seek out unusual (more comfortable) places to urinate.
- Cats tend to behave atypically when in pain; often associating the box with experiencing pain, they attempt to ‘hide from or remove the pain’ which may lead to inappropriate places.
  - Declawed cats are over-represented in litter box avoidance. Removing portions of the toe leads to early arthritis and long term discomfort; declawed cats must learn to walk differently, affecting their whole skeletal structure.
- It is far more abnormal for a cat to defecate outside of the litter box and typically an indicator of a medical condition. Please call to discuss.
- If you’re suspecting a medical condition, please schedule an appointment and/ or attempt to collect a urine sample to bring in for analysis.
  - If attempting to collect urine sample at home, you may try to isolate the offending cat with a clean litter box with material that will not absorb urine (ex: shredded wax paper). A diagnostic sample must be uncontaminated and, ideally, less than 8 hours old, refrigerate if unable to bring to us immediately.
  - Kit4Cat<sup>®</sup> Urine Collection Kit is a product that we’ve heard personal success in collecting a sample at home. You can find the product kit online. If you pursue this at home collection method, again, a diagnostic sample needs to be collected, refrigerated and brought into us as soon as possible.

❖ **If your cat, specifically male, seems to be straining to urinate, producing little to no urine and/or is vocalizing while in the box, seek medical attention immediately. This could be a potentially life-threatening emergency involving a urethral obstruction.**