



Confinement of Owned Indoor Cats

December 2007

This AVMA (AAFP) policy statement strongly encourages owners of domestic cats in urban and suburban areas to maintain them indoors, or allowed outdoors only if strictly supervised or in a properly constructed and maintained outdoor enclosure.

Veterinarians are encouraged to educate clients and the public concerning the dangers associated with allowing cats free-roam access to the outdoors. Free-roaming cats may be exposed to injury, suffering, and death from vehicles, attacks from other animals, human cruelty, poisons, and traps. Additionally, these cats have an increased potential to be exposed to feline-specific and zoonotic diseases.

Lastly, adherence to this policy also reduces predation of native wildlife populations, a goal and policy of the AVMA and the AAFP.

Veterinarians are also encouraged to educate clients about the importance of an environmentally enriched indoor environment. Enriching the indoor environment or allowing cats to be in a strictly supervised outdoor environment or enclosure helps prevent boredom, stress, and inactivity - common causes of behavior problems, and diseases such as obesity and its associated risks (diabetes mellitus, hepatic lipidosis, osteoarthritis, heart disease), and feline interstitial cystitis.

Many feline behavior problems can be prevented or treated with an enriched environment that includes stimulation and materials to allow cats to perform their normal behaviors. Cats need companionship,

and enjoy both interactive toys and hunting games. They too enjoy playing on their own and rotation of toys prevents boredom. Cats need items in the house to allow them to perform their normal behavior – cat scratching posts to scratch in desirable locations; and cat trees, perches, or shelves to allow for climbing and to increase the overall space in the home.

Feral Cats

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The AAFP strongly supports efforts to humanely control the feral cat population. These efforts include reducing the source of feral cats by encouraging owners to keep cats indoors (see statement on owned indoor cats), permanent identification methods so that lost cats can be returned to their owners (see statement on identification of cats) and education on responsible pet ownership. Pre-pubertal spaying and neutering is also encouraged to decrease the numbers of newborn cats.

The AAFP recognizes the need to decrease the current population of feral cats to improve their welfare and to reduce their potential as a source of zoonotic diseases, public nuisance, and negative impacts on wildlife and ecosystems. Although no single control method is suitable for all situations the AAFP supports humane population control methods such as 'trap-neuter-return', relocation to managed colonies or appropriate sanctuaries, and where appropriate adoption into homes.