

Boxed Out: A Tale of Litterbox Woe

Brookelyn Nitzkin

Information Specialist, Office of Public Engagement, University of Illinois, College of Veterinary Medicine

If you are having a problem with your cat using its litter box, you are not alone. It is one of the most common gripes owners have with their cats. We've called in Linda Case, a behavior specialist and adjunct assistant professor at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine, Urbana, Ill., and owner of the Autumn Gold Dog Training Center in Mahomet, Ill., to help explain some of the issues surrounding litter box usage.

Case explains that cats don't use their litter box for one of two simple reasons: either they have developed some aversion to their litter box or some stressor is causing them to stop using the box.

The most common cause of litter box aversion is the simple, undeniable truth that it may not be clean enough. Case says, "If you are having any inkling at all that this could be your problem, the first thing we say is to scoop every day and completely change the litter more often than you have been." Another reason a cat might develop an aversion to its litter box is simple accessibility. Some cats don't want to have to work hard to get to the bathroom, and by placing the litter box in an accessible place you're removing this obstacle. Or, your cat may simply not like the spot that you have designated for it.

Stressors can cause your cat to urinate outside of the litter box. Oftentimes multiple cat households create stresses that are undetectable to humans. Group dynamics amongst cats are a burgeoning field in behavioral research. Recent literature suggests that even though one cat may not be being kept away from the litter box, there may be anxiety that is manifested in inappropriate urination or in marking behavior. The rule of thumb is that an owner should have a litter box for each cat, plus an additional one. These litter boxes should be placed in various locations to allow your cats to have some choice in location and with whom they choose to share their box.

"Litter box aversion often goes hand-in-hand with location preferences. Cats tend to prefer either smooth porcelain surfaces or soft absorbent surfaces," says Case.

She reminds that cleaning the spot well, keeping the cat away from the location, and covering up that spot are ways to break the cycle of litter box aversion and location preferences. In some cases you may need to retrain your cat to use his litter box. This may require isolating the cat to a small amount of space, perhaps a single room, with the litter box. You can then gradually allow the cat more space privileges as it successfully uses its litter box.

Common feline medical conditions, such as urinary tract infections, can cause a litter box-loving cat to become an inappropriate eliminator. Cats also have unbelievable memories for specific incidents paired with people or locations. For example, a cat who has a urinary tract infection and goes to use its litter box may feel pain when trying to urinate. This cat will then associate the pain with the litter box, almost as if saying to itself 'Avoid that place, and you won't feel this pain.' If your cat is normally good about using its litter box and suddenly starts urinating elsewhere, it is a good idea to have your pet checked by your veterinarian for any medical causes.

Finally, some people complain that their cat will "misbehave" and urinate on a bed or on clothes when the owner leaves the house. People claim that their cat is "angry" with them for leaving and is acting out to spite its owner. This claim, however real it might seem, simply isn't the case.

"Cats don't develop separation anxiety in the same manner as dogs because their social groups aren't as strongly attached," says Case. Cats do, however, become stressed by change. This change causes anxiety which manifests itself by in appropriate elimination.

"Try to avoid blame placing. It is only anxiety and stress shown as this species way," says Case. Furthermore, placing blame will not help you resolve the problem any sooner.

For more information about litter box issues, contact your local veterinarian or animal behaviorist.

<http://www.cvm.uiuc.edu/petcolumns/index.cfm?function=showarticle&id=527>

AVMA Policy Counters Declaw Ban

SCHAUMBURG, ILL. — The American Veterinary Medical Association's Executive Board adopted a policy designed to steer local municipalities away from regulating veterinary procedures.

The policy, brought by the AVMA State Advocacy Committee during the board's November meeting, addresses a West Hollywood, Calif., ordinance that makes it a criminal misdemeanor for veterinarians to perform non-therapeutic cat declaws within city limits. The city's authority to ban a state-regulated veterinary procedure was upheld by an appeals court in June 2007. Four months later, the California Supreme Court refused to hear the California Veterinary Medical Association's (CVMA) petition challenging the case.

That decision will have a "profound impact on the regulation and practice of veterinary medicine, not only in California, but throughout the United States," State Advocacy Committee documents say. "The West Hollywood declawing ordinance could become precedent for thousands of local government units that may wish to consider restricting not only cat declawing, but potentially a variety of other veterinary procedures as well, which will, in turn, undermine state regulation of veterinary medicine, a system that has served the American public and animal patients for over 100 years."

Legislatures have established and maintain boards of veterinary medicine to regulate the profession under state practice acts and enforce professional standards. Allowing a municipality to create its own regulations will chip away at the uniformity of state laws authorized by legislative statutes, the advocacy committee's backgrounder states.

West Hollywood officials have announced their intention to impose restrictions on other controversial veterinary medical procedures, such as ear cropping and tail docking.

While the AVMA policy serves as guidance and has no legal teeth to fight the local ban, CVMA officials say they are not giving up. The group plans to explore writing legislation to upend the ordinance if the California Department of Consumer Affairs, which oversees regulatory agencies, fails to challenge it. The deadline to enter bills for the state Legislature's review is Feb. 22.

Pit Bull Law Tossed Out in Reading

A Pennsylvania appeals court has muzzled an out-of-control Reading city ordinance that required pit bulls -- and other dogs deemed "dangerous" on the basis of their breed -- be subject to restrictions that included being kept on three-foot leashes when outside the home.

The divided Commonwealth Court decision sided with two pit-bull owners -- Stacie Stankiewicz and Kenneth Steeves Sr. -- who have been fighting the city ordinance since it passed eight years ago.

The court threw out the law because it conflicted with, and was preempted by, a state law defining what makes a dog "dangerous." The state law is not "breed specific."

The Reading ordinance was among the strictest and most backward in the country, defining aggressive dogs as those that are -- even partly -- of a breed that accounted for 40 percent or more of dog-bite incidents reported in the city during the prior year. It required such dogs, when outside the home, be muzzled and kept on a leash shorter than three feet, and required their owners to pay higher fees to register them.

Violation of the ordinance was punishable with fines of up to \$1,000 or 30 days in jail.

"The absurdity was that dangerous dog breeds changed from year to year, based on the dog-bite statistics -- that was the crux of the lawsuit," Al Kauffman, attorney for plaintiffs, said in an [Associated Press account](#) of the ruling.

Pennsylvania's state Dog Law classifies as "dangerous" an individual dog that has attacked someone without provocation, one that killed or badly injured a domestic animal while off the dog owner's property, or one that has been used to commit a crime.

Pit Bulls Lose in Little Rock

Pit Bull owners in Little Rock, AR, will now have to put a sticker in the window of their home to indicate a pit bull is on the property. They will be required to pay an annual registration fee of \$150 and take photos of both themselves and the dog. No more than two pit bulls will be allowed in any home, and the dogs must be micro-chipped and sterilized.

North Carolina Legislative Updates

FORSYTH COUNTY. Forsyth County's Animal Control Advisory Board voted unanimously to recommend that county commissioners not pass any regulations that would single out or ban particular breeds of dogs as dangerous. One Animal Control Advisory Board member requested exploring the possibility of Mandatory Spay Neuter with breeding permits for breeders of purebreds/show animals with a provision for inspection by Animal Control of the premises. The Animal Control Advisory Board has previously discussed changes to current zoning ordinances and the possibility of pet limits in residential neighborhoods. The Animal Control Advisory Board meets the 3rd Thursday of every month.

GASTON COUNTY. A foul-smelling yard could result in the punishment of pet owners in Gaston County. A proposed ordinance would give Animal Control officers the authority to deal with people whose yards are giving off a bad odor because they aren't taking proper care of their animals. Currently, officers can only take action in cruelty situations.

ALAMANCE COUNTY. Within the Animal Services Task Force four subcommittees (Public Policy, Education/Public Relations, Spay/Neuter, Adoption) were formed to begin the process of identifying how the Task Force can best address the issue of spay/neuter in Alamance County. The Public Policy subcommittee has been charged with the responsibility of developing countywide policies that will promote spay/neuter, such as Mandatory Licensing, Differential Licensing, and collection of fines to promote spay/neuter. Ideas are being collected for funding a low cost spay/neuters in the county. Additionally, the standard playbook documents such as sample mandatory spay/neuter laws, building a rabies vaccination database to utilize for enforcement of additional licensing, and breeder permitting have been introduced. No definite plans have been formulated and the committee is not moving forward with any noticeable speed; however, the Animal Services Task Force and its subcommittees should be monitored by all interested parties: breeders, hunters, and animal owners in Alamance County.

Hypoglycemia Alert Dogs Offer Assistance To People With Diabetes

20 Feb 2008 Glucose monitors, test strips, and lancets: people with diabetes are all too familiar with the equipment used to test their blood glucose (sugar) levels. Now some people are adding a different kind of aid to their diabetes management regimen. The March 2008 issue of *Diabetes Forecast*, the consumer magazine of the American Diabetes Association (ADA), features an article about assistance dogs that are trained to sense episodes of human hypoglycemia, or low blood glucose, and sound a life-saving alert.

According to the article, these dogs seem to sense a dangerous drop in blood glucose before it begins, allowing the people they work with to prevent an episode altogether. Some dogs seem to sense high blood glucose, too. Mark Ruefenacht is a forensic scientist with type 1 diabetes who started a hypoglycemia alert dog training center in California and has been placing trained dogs with people who need them for three years.

"Clients are coming back saying, 'I have never had better control of my blood sugar in my life as I have since I got this dog.'"

Scientists remain unsure about how the dogs are able to sense changes in their human companions. It is believed that the dogs are reacting to scents created by chemical changes related to glucose imbalance, but no one knows exactly which chemicals cause the scent.

Despite this scientific uncertainty, hypoglycemia alert dogs have provided a great sense of relief to people with diabetes and their families, including parents of young children with diabetes and adults whose history of hypoglycemic episodes made it difficult or even dangerous to live alone.

Currently, there are only a few groups in the United States that are training assistance dogs to sense hypoglycemia. The training requires years of expensive work, which severely limits the number of people who can be paired with dogs. For those who do get the chance, however, the benefit can be remarkable.

"The first time that dog gets you up in the middle of the night because your child is dropping into a serious low, rapidly you realize it's worth every penny you spent, and every minute you had to wait," says Donna Cope, whose child has diabetes.

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/97981.php>

May I Pet Your Dog?

The how-to guide for kids meeting dogs (and dogs meeting kids)

By **Stephanie Calmenson** Illustrated by **Jan Ormerod**

Dogs bite kids. Why? Most often it is because children unknowingly demonstrate inappropriate behavior toward dogs that frightens or upsets them, and the dogs instinctively react to protect themselves. Many children have never been taught that there is a polite and safe way to approach and pet a dog. Many parents have never considered that children must be taught that correct behavior around pets matters.

Now we have been provided with a great tool to help us teach children just that skill. Stephanie Calmenson has written a children's book that is a show-and-tell gem, whether it is read to toddlers by parents and educators, or read by somewhat older children by themselves.

Because the story is so charmingly and simply narrated by Harry, a real-life longhaired dachshund belonging to author Stephanie Calmenson, its very simplicity belies the actual import of the book's message. The clever illustrations beautifully emphasize the author's carefully chosen, profound words:

"Ask the owner before greeting the dog. Pet gently. Big dogs and little dogs can be friends. Don't approach dogs who are not accompanied by an owner. Don't approach dogs whose owners say no. Stay away from dogs who are sleeping, eating, caring for puppies, chewing a bone, toy, or stick. Service dogs are working dogs who should not be petted when working."

Stephanie has written a slim (32 pages) easy-to-read mountain of information that is invaluable. Jan Ormerod has accompanied the text with the best teaching illustrations I have yet seen in any publication. Buy "MAY I PET YOUR DOG" or borrow it from your library and read it often. I have.

Barbara Axel

Notes from AVMA 2007 Legislative Year-End Summary

As the 2007 legislative sessions come to an end, we look back over the various bills and regulations introduced and adopted in the states this year, as well as a few landmark court decisions. It was once again a busy year in the field of veterinary medicine as states tackled items such as animal cruelty, mandatory spay/neuter, horse slaughter, non-economic damages, and loan repayment among many others.

Overall, 167,411 bills were introduced in the 50 states and District of Columbia, with 42,308 adopted. The AVMA electronic tracking system identified over 4,400 bills and regulations of interest to the veterinary profession. We distributed 1,390 legislative and regulatory alerts to state veterinary medical associations in 2007. We responded to 83 requests for legal or legislative research.

In 27 states, bills introduced in 2007 carry over and can be acted on in 2008. On the other hand, legislatures are not scheduled to meet in 2008 in Arkansas, Montana, North Dakota, Nevada, Oregon, and Texas.

On specific topics, we continue to see states increase penalties for animal cruelty, with 43 states now providing felony penalties. States are also defining new offenses in their statutes, such as removal of an electronic dog collar and interfering with a service animal.

Four states passed laws in 2007 enabling family pets to be included in domestic abuse orders of protection, and North Dakota joined the growing list of states allowing pet trusts.

New Mexico and Louisiana were the last states to make cockfighting illegal, while in July, dogfighting received national attention with the federal indictments against football star Michael Vick.

Six more states adopted language restricting dog tethering. We are not aware of any states enacting breed-specific dog legislation in 2007, but several bills pertaining to microchip identification of dangerous dogs were adopted.

Colorado now requires veterinarians to report instances of animal cruelty and animal fighting, while North Carolina and Oregon adopted immunity for reporting animal cruelty.

California experienced an emotional and hard fought battle on the issue of spay/neuter for dogs and cats. A bill calling for mandatory sterilization was shelved, although a narrower version that addresses irresponsible owners may be introduced next year. http://www.avma.org/advocacy/state/legislative_updates/default.asp

Animal Pain Management Webcast Offered

The Morris Animal Foundation (MAF) will sponsor live Webcasts on pain management in pets for both veterinarians and pet owners. Both Webcasts will be held March 13.

The veterinarian's Webcast, which will be held from 7 to 8 p.m. (EDT) will cover all aspects of pain management of concern for the veterinarian, including common pain issues, overlooked causes of pain, anticipating and scoring pain, team training and resources, plus critical client communication. Another Webcast on pet pain directed to pet owners will follow from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. EDT. Both Webcasts will be available indefinitely for viewing by global audiences at the Webcast address.

Participate in the Webcast at: www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org/livechat.

Robin Downing, DVM, will lead the Webcast. In 2005, Downing became the third veterinarian in the world to acquire diplomate status from the American Academy of Pain Management. As of today, fewer than a dozen veterinarians worldwide hold this credential. Downing is the founder and past president of the International Veterinary Academy of Pain Management. Contributing to the discussion will be Patricia Olson, DVM, PhD, president and CEO Morris Animal Foundation.

Protecting your right to responsibly own and breed animals.

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For more information on animal health, training, reports on pet issues, animal sheltering, or to learn the difference between animal welfare and animal rights – visit our website at www.ncraoa.com

North Carolina Responsible Animal Owners Alliance, Inc. (NCRAOA) is a statewide organization of animal owners and professionals dedicated to animal welfare, responsible animal ownership, and maintaining the rights of responsible citizens to breed and own animals. NCRAOA, a 501(c)3 organization, provides education and information to the public and supports reasonable and humane animal welfare laws.

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