

BEHAVIOUR SERIES No. 1:

CLEANING UP URINE AND FAECES MARKS

Please remember that this advice sheet is for information only and should be used in conjunction with advice from your veterinary surgeon. A full feline behavioural service is available at Cat's Whiskers Veterinary Clinic - please contact the clinic to arrange a home visit.

House-soiling and indoor marking can begin for a number of reasons but, in some cases it continues purely because the cat can detect the trace smell of urine or faeces. Removing these odours is essential to stop the problem. The best way to remove odours from existing sites is as follows:

- Make up 3 sprayer bottles, labelled 1, 2, and 3. They should be filled in accordance with the following instructions:
Bottle 1: A solution of *biological* clothes washing powder or liquid in water (approximately 1 part of powder/liquid cleaner to 10 parts of water)
Bottle 2: Plain water
Bottle 3: Surgical spirit (clear surgical spirit, not coloured methylated spirit)
- You also need a bucket and rolls of paper kitchen towel. Do not use reusable cloths to clean with because they tend to spread the scent. Keep the spray bottles and towel in the bucket to avoid leaving scent marks where they have been placed on the floor
- Each soiled site should be cleaned in the following way:
 - Use paper towel to remove any urine and faeces - dispose of the paper towel
 - Spray the area with Bottle 1 and then wipe clean with paper towel - dispose of the paper towel
 - Spray with Bottle 2, wipe clean and mop dry with paper towel - dispose of the paper towel
 - Spray with Bottle 3, and allow to dry completely before allowing the cat into this area

You should test this cleaning method on a small and inconspicuous area of the carpet or fabric you are cleaning to ensure that it will not be damaged. If you are cleaning curtains or furniture covers that can be removed and washed then machine-wash them according to the manufacturer's instructions.

HOW OFTEN TO CLEAN?

Once you have cleaned a particular spot once, it is tempting to leave it until the cat soils there again. In fact, this means that urine odours will continue to accumulate because one round of cleaning will never be enough to remove all of the odour. Instead, you should clean each spot several times each week, until it has not been soiled at all for at least 3 weeks. This will remove all odours and reduce the chance of further soiling if the cat has a relapse.

- Make a chart of all the places where your cat has ever left urine or faeces
- Clean all of these places once to start with, so that the whole house is clean
- Clean them all regularly until no further marking is seen

PREVENTING DAMAGE CAUSED BY URINE AND FAECES

Cleaning is no good if pee and poo are able to get into cracks and crevices, or spoil furnishings that cannot easily be cleaned. These places will trap smells that we don't like and which may attract your cat back to go to the toilet or mark again.

Particular problem areas are:

- Wooden furniture

- Cracks between floorboards or panels of laminated flooring
- The junction between flooring and skirting boards, kitchen cupboards etc
- The crack at the top edge of skirting board
- Grouting between ceramic tiles (on floors or walls)
- Electrical equipment and electrical outlets

These, and any other potential traps for urine, must be cleaned and sealed so that urine odours do not penetrate.

- Wooden furniture should be regularly waxed with a heavy-grade wax polish (not a spray) so that the surface is protected. The feet of wooden chairs and tables can sometimes absorb urine, so these should be protected with a dab of varnish on the underside if possible.
- Joints in wooden or laminate floors should be sealed and painted over with at least 2 coats of a high-quality varnish. Gaps between floorboards are easily sealed with rubber or silicone bath sealant, which is available in many colours, before painting over with varnish.
- The junction between a wooden or hard floor and the bottom of skirting board should be sealed with a rubber or silicone bathroom sealant. The same method may be used to seal the top edge of skirting board.
- Grouting is often porous so it absorbs urine. It can be steam-cleaned and treated with a sealant, or replaced with a waterproof equivalent (sealant for terracotta tiles and grouting is available from most DIY shops).
- Electrical equipment such as toasters, kettles, televisions and audio equipment may become targets for spraying, because they heat up and release smells that cats find objectionable. Once they have been contaminated with urine they will release a urine smell every time they switch on, which attracts further spray marking.
- Soiled cooking equipment should be discarded, as it presents a health hazard unless it can be completely cleaned.
- Audio and TV equipment that has previously been soiled must be cleaned with great care. It may not be possible to remove all traces of urine. Audio equipment may need to be put into a glass fronted rack or cupboard away from access by the cat, and TV equipment covered with a polythene sheet when it is switched off.
- Urine getting into electrical outlets can create a serious risk of shock or fire, so access to these locations should be restricted. As an additional protection, electrical outlets can be protected by covering them with cling-film. Alternatively a flap of polythene may be taped to the wall above the socket so that it drapes over the outlet and redirects urine over it in the manner of a canopy.

REPLACING FLOORING AND SOFT FURNISHINGS

If an area is persistently soiled then urine and faeces odour will soak in and may be very difficult to remove. Consider removing carpets, curtains and soft furnishing that have been badly damaged by urine or faeces. You may be able to have these cleaned professionally but they may have to be destroyed and replaced.

If carpet or other flooring must be replaced due to soiling then the floor underneath must be scrubbed clean with a biological cleaner. Rotten or sodden timbers should be removed and replaced. The floor must be cleaned several times and then allowed to dry before any new flooring is put down. Paint wooden boards with varnish or gloss paint before laying new flooring over them, as this helps to reduce the return of old odours. To prevent urine from soaking through the new flooring, and to prevent remaining odours from returning, it is advisable to put down a layer of thick polythene sheet in overlapping strips before laying the new flooring. Consider putting a layer of polythene between the carpet and underlay, so that any accidental soiling is easier to clean. This extra layer may be put in strategically in locations where the risk of future soiling is highest.

Amanda Nicholls BVetMed MRCVS