

## Feline Inappropriate Elimination Disorder: Spraying or Marking Behaviors

Cats are territorial animals meaning they stake out a claim to a particular space, area, or object by marking it with their scent. Cats mark their territory through a variety of methods and at different levels of intensity. The lowest level of intensity involves the release of pheromones. The definition of a pheromone is a clear, undetectable substance that is released through specific areas of the cat's body. A cat who is marking his/her territory does so through three primary methods:

1. Through pheromones located in the pads of their feet. When a cat scratches or attempts to sharpen their claws they are also releasing a pheromone through the pads of their feet. This pheromone lets other cats know this territory has been claimed.
2. Through facial pheromones located near the whisker base of the cat. When a cat rubs their face on an object they are again releasing pheromones to let other cats know this territory has been claimed.
3. The final and most intense method of marking territory that poses a problem for us is through the release of small amounts of urine on specific target areas. These areas may be on a vertical plain or horizontal plain. In addition to the release of urine, some cats will use stool as a form of marking behavior. The release of stool to mark territory is less common but still a method that needs to be discussed.

It first needs to be determined if your cat is exhibiting marking behaviors through spraying or exhibiting house-soiling issues. This can be determined through a series of questions that examines the environment that the cat lives in. Another crucial question to be answered is the cat still using their litterbox?

Marking occurs when the cat backs up to a vertical surface such as a wall, doorframe, and/or chair, etc. and directs a stream of urine towards it. Usually a small amount of urine is released. The body position of the cat is usually standing with the tail arched high up over their body. Some cats' tails shiver as they release the urine. However, if the cat is marking on horizontal surfaces then they may be in a squat position with their tail arched high over their bodies. It is also true that females can spray or mark their territory. It is usually a way for an intact female to attract male suitors but can also be done out of stress and the need to defend her territory whether she is spayed or unspayed.

### Causes:

- ✓ Medical condition: if your cat has eliminated outside of the litterbox, immediately contact your veterinarian and make an appointment to have your cat examined.
- ✓ Hormonal including intact males or females in heat.
- ✓ Any stimulus that increases stress in the environment.
- ✓ The litterbox is not clean, the type of litter is irritating, the size of the litterbox is objectionable, plastic litterbox liners are being used, the box is covered or uncovered, location aversion
- ✓ A new person (especially a baby) in the house
- ✓ A person has recently left the house, permanently or temporarily
- ✓ New furniture, carpet, or drapes
- ✓ Rearrangement of the furniture



2925 Sheridan Drive, Tonawanda, NY 14150  
Phone: 716-465-6555 Fax: 716-381-9735  
www.purrfectpawsabc.com

- ✓ Moving into a new house or apartment or remodeling
- ✓ Conflict between household pets
- ✓ A new pet has been introduced into the home
- ✓ A pet has recently left the house
- ✓ Your indoor cat can see or hear a neighborhood cat outside
- ✓ A cat "in heat" in the neighborhood
- ✓ A dog in the neighborhood that can be seen or heard by your indoor cat
- ✓ Any stimulus that is perceived by the cat as a potential threat and increases the drive to protect its territory.

### Treatment for Spraying:

- ✓ Spay or neuter all cats.
- ✓ **NEVER use PUNISHMENT!!!** This only makes the problem worse. Do not rub your cat's nose in it or take them to the "spot" and yell or hit them. This will only teach them to fear you and your approach.
- ✓ Maintain optimal litterbox situation.
- ✓ Alter the environment to decrease visual cues from outside.
- ✓ Move a litterbox to the area(s) being targeted.
- ✓ Make the targeted area unpleasant such as using aluminum foil, scent deterrents, plastic carpet runners turned over, or double sided tape.
- ✓ Place food and/or water bowls in the targeted area.
- ✓ Implement the use of *Feliway* spray or a *Feliway* diffuser. This product is an analogue of facial pheromones secreted by cats to mark territory. The goal is for the cat to rub his face on the area where *Feliway* has been sprayed and not use urine.
- ✓ Clean the areas with an odor-neutralizing product. It is critical to completely remove the odor from a previously soiled area.
- ✓ **Increase exercise and mental stimulation:** Play with your cat in the areas she is likely to target.
- ✓ Before the problem will improve, each stressful environmental factor will have to be addressed. A behavior modification program should be designed and implemented.
- ✓ Pharmacological therapy may be needed in addition to behavior modification. Medication alone will not be beneficial. If drug therapy is required, your veterinarian must closely monitor your case. The medication must never suddenly be stopped. Your cat will gradually have to be weaned off the medication with the guidance of your veterinarian. This will greatly improve chances of success.

The success rate for resolving marking behaviors is high. You must first identify the reason for the behavior, address the stressful stimulus and treat the soiled areas. Remember your cat is doing what is instinctual and is **NOT** being spiteful. Treating a cat with an inappropriate elimination disorder takes patience, consistency, and the willing to look beyond a quick fix.

### "I Have More Questions"

- ✓ If you have additional questions about this subject, please contact Purrfect Paws Animal Behavior Center, LLC at 716-465-6555.



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