Scoop, There It Is!

Did you know that one of the most common reasons for cats to be surrendered to the Humane Society is not using their litterbox? Inappropriate elimination can be caused by underlying medical or behavioral issues or sometimes a combination of both.

Medical issues that can cause urinating outside of the box can include diabetes, urinary tract inflammation (infections are rare), kidney disease, and bladder or kidney stones. Some of these diseases cause the animals to produce more urine which can quickly make the box unattractive or make it difficult for the animal to get to the box in a timely fashion. Others can cause pain during urination which can then bring in a behavioral component; “it hurts when I use the box so I don’t want to use it anymore.” Medical issues that may cause cats to not defecate in the box include any intestinal disease that may cause diarrhea, constipation, or abdominal pain. Pancreatitis and arthritis are also common causes of discomfort and may lead to association of pain with the litter box.

Behavioral issues can include the wrong type of box or litter for an individual cat, lack of privacy, inadequate cleanliness and associations with unpleasant events. Face it; if you are minding your own business, doing your business and a golden retriever puppy comes out of no where and pounces on you wouldn’t you be hesitant to use that box again?

So, what can you do to make it less likely that your cat will have problems? First and foremost is cleanliness. Cats are very clean animals. Think about it; they groom to clean themselves numerous times a day. A cat’s sense of smell is much stronger than ours. Ideal is to scoop the box as soon as it has been used but at a minimum daily. Once a week the entire box should be dumped, scrubbed with hot water, dried and refilled. Second is size and number of boxes. Although some cats do well with 1 small box, the ideal is to have 1 box per cat plus 1. So, if you have 1 cat you should have 2 litterboxes, if you have 3 cats you should have 4 litterboxes. The boxes should be big enough so that your pet can comfortably turn around without touching the sides.

Most studies show that cats prefer clumping, non-scented litter approximately 2 inches deep. However, there are multiple types of litter available and you may need to do some detective work to find out what your cat prefers. Offer several boxes with different litter to see if there is a preference. Most cats prefer non-hooded boxes so they, and odors, are not trapped. Cats with arthritis or other medical issues may need low sided boxes.

As realtors like to say “location is everything.” Boxes should be in areas that afford privacy but also should be easy to get to. Expecting a 15-year-old cat who spends most of its day on the bed upstairs to go down 2 flights of stairs to the basement is a recipe for disaster. Boxes should ideally be kept in a quiet place where there is minimal human or animal traffic.

If your pet is not using the litterbox and you are following the above recommendations then let us help you to “think outside the box.” Your feline friend is not being spiteful, they are trying to tell you something is wrong. To discuss your pet’s litterbox habits please call us at 410-751-0091.