

ENVIRONMENTAL REASONS CATS DON'T USE THE LITTER BOX



Cats are creatures of habit. Any change to their environment can cause them stress. Eliminating outside the litter box might be their way of voicing dislike for a situation and/or reasserting territorial boundaries.



PSYCHOLOGICAL

A cat that experiences some kind of upsetting event while using the litter box might associate the litter box with that event. This could result in the cat either being reluctant to use the litter box or avoiding it altogether.

Things that might upset your cat while he's using his litter box include:

- ⇒ being cornered or trapped by a dog, cat or person
- ⇒ hearing a loud noise or commotion
- ⇒ seeing something frightening or startling

Signs that your cat has been upset while using the litter box include:

- ⇒ running into the box and then leaving again quickly
- ⇒ eliminating nearby, but not inside his litter box
- ⇒ urinating in the litter box sometimes and sometimes urinating elsewhere
- ⇒ defecating in the litter box but urinating outside the litter box

Any of the above may indicate that your cat is worried about using the litter box, especially if he has reliably used litter box in the past.

Anti-anxiety medications may be helpful if the source of anxiety can't be identified or altered.

TERRITORIAL

According to the American Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), 30% of cats that eliminate inappropriately don't have litter box problems. Instead, a change at home may have led the cat to feel a need to reassert territorial boundaries. These cats are urine marking.

Urine makes a statement about:

- ⇒ what property belongs to them
- ⇒ how long ago they were in the area
- ⇒ when other cats can expect them to return
- ⇒ if they're looking for a mate

Urine marking often has these characteristics:

- ⇒ appears on vertical surfaces or in a horizontal line
- ⇒ contain less volume than voiding in a litter box
- ⇒ smells pungent

Signs of urine marking include the following:

- ⇒ spraying on a vertical surface
- ⇒ problem starts after there's been a change such as furniture being moved or added
- ⇒ area marked is near a door or window
- ⇒ area marked involves the owner's bed or laundry
- ⇒ area marked is the same each time
- ⇒ cat is not spayed/neutered

A territorially-insecure cat might squat or spray to claim areas. Conversely, a territorially-dominant cat may mark to display victory or confidence, or in response to a threat.

CHANGING THE ENVIRONMENT TO ENCOURAGE LITTER BOX USE

One of the main ways to address environmental reasons for a cat eliminating inappropriately outside the litter box is to increase its sense of security.

Use the litter box checklist to ensure litter boxes are in a place of solace and security.

Provide plenty of resources so your cat isn't scared or bored. Make sure there are several horizontal spaces for your cat to hide and vertical spaces to climb.

In multi-cat homes, give all cats a reason to like each other by using highly-valued treats/food.

Provide lots of interactive play. Marci Koski of Feline Behavior Solutions says, "Play is a great way to provide physical and mental stimulation, give an outlet for excess energy, build confidence by encouraging natural predatory behaviors, and improve the human-cat bond. I recommend daily play sessions with your cat using an interactive wand toy with various lures to replicate prey items. Try to get your cat to engage by staring, stalking, chasing, and grabbing their prey!"



Dr. Liz Davidson of Online Vet stresses that cat urine contamination must be dealt with as soon as possible to ensure your cat doesn't continue to use inappropriate surfaces as a toilet.

Find areas where your cat has urinated by using a blacklight to highlight the stains.

Clean and treat soiled areas with an odor-neutralizing product. Enzymatic cleaners target uric acid and remove the lingering smell.



Change the appearance of the most soiled areas by adding appropriate furniture.

Place some of your cat's food in the soiled areas.

Anything your cat has soiled in the past that cannot be visually-changed or removed should be made off limits by temporarily covering it with an unpleasant surface.