

## LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT LITTER

There are some subjects we'd rather not discuss or that we don't think are of any major importance; but, in fact, a scoop of cat litter can factor into a cat's outdoor banishment, relinquishment, or euthanasia. Approximately 23% of cats are surrendered to shelters because of inappropriate voiding problems. In light of such scary outcomes for our cats, litter is a serious issue.

The very first thing you need to do when your pet is peeing outside of its litter box is eliminate the possibility of infection within the urinary tract. Collect a urine sample and take it to your cat's veterinarian. The vet can test the specimen to determine if infection is present. Right from the start, you and the vet can determine if the problem is behavioral or evidence of a physical problem. The longer you wait to determine the cause of the problem, the harder it will be to correct it. Some toileting issues are due to marking, litter aversions, location of the box, or type of litter. However, sometimes the problem can be unrelated to the litter or box, such as inter-cat aggression.

A cat's preference for sandy material for litter can be traced back to Africa where wildcats liked to use desert sand as a toilet. Today we know that cats prefer granular, sand-like material called clumping or scoopable litter as compared to large-granule litter or recycled paper litter. The basic component of clumping clay litter is sodium bentonite, clay made from volcanic ash. Then we add fragrances, fillers, bacterial growth inhibitors, and absorption additives. As a general rule, the fewer additives, the better. Baking soda, although very good for masking odor, is often a reason why cats do not like to use the box. Fragrance matters more to us than our cats. If there is a preference for a fragrance, cats prefer cedar scent. A citrus smell seems to be less desirable.

Cleanliness of the litter box is directly related to its use. No one likes to use a dirty toilet, and cats are especially particular about it. Cats also like to have privacy and enough space to squat. Most cats do not like hooded boxes for one simple reason – they are too low and too small. Almost 90% of cats with behavioral problems stopped voiding outside the box when they were presented with larger boxes. As with most things, size matters. A litter box should be at least 1 1/2 times the length of the cat.

The Golden Rule for litter boxes is daily scooping and regular box washing will make cohabitation with your cat pleasant and enjoyable for both of you. Just like us, cats like a clean bathroom. Make sure their boxes are always sparkling clean!