



ALLEN COUNTY

SPCA

YOUR COMMUNITY. YOUR SHELTER. YOUR PETS.

LITTERBOX PROBLEMS

There are a variety of reasons why cats may go outside the litterbox. Sometimes, the reason the litterbox problem initially started is not the same reason its continuing. For example, if your cat stops using the box while it is sick, it could develop a preference for a different surface or location in your house. Cats don't stop using the litterbox because they are mad or upset with us. By carefully observing your cat and its environment, you can identify the problems and change them so your cat uses the litterbox.

Medical Problems

It's common for cats to not use their litterbox when they have a medical problem. For example, a urinary tract infection can be very painful. The cat associates the pain with the litterbox and begin to avoid it. If your cat is having a house-soiling problem, check with your veterinarian first to rule out any medical problems for the behavior. Cats don't always act sick so this change in behavior can help you find a medical problem.

Anxiety

When a cat is feeling stressed or anxious they sometimes will not use their litterbox. Some causes of anxiety are things like a new baby, a new pet, moving, conflict between animals in the home, or a roaming cat sitting outside the window. If your cat isn't using the litterbox in response to a new resident in your home, have them make friends with your cat by feeding, grooming, and playing with your cat. Make your cat have a positive association with this new person. Resolve conflicts between animals in your home, and restrict your cat's access to doors and windows where they can see animals outside. If this isn't possible, discourage the presence of other animals near your house. Reduce your cat's stress with stress reducing techniques and play therapy.

Aversion to the Litterbox

Your cat may have decided that the litterbox is an unpleasant place because: the box isn't clean enough, they have experienced a painful medical problem, they have been startled by a noise while using the box, they have been ambushed by another cat, dog, or you in the box, or they associate the litterbox with punishment (they were punished for going outside the box and then placed inside).



Keep the litterbox clean. Scoop at least once a day and change the litter as needed. You can also add a new box in a different location that is not near any appliances and is easily accessible with a new type of litter. This will allow your cat to form a new, positive association with a litterbox. If ambushing is a problem, have a litterbox with more than one exit.

Allen County SPCA
4914 S. Hanna Street, Fort Wayne, IN 46806
260-744-0454 • info@allencountyspca.org
www.AllenCountySPCA.org

LITTERBOX PROBLEMS

Surface Preferences

All animals develop preferences for a certain surface to eliminate on that may be established early in life or can change overnight. Your cat may have a surface preference if: they consistently eliminate on a particular texture, such as carpet, bedding, tile, cement, bathtubs, or sinks; they frequently scratch on the same texture after going, even if they used the litterbox; and they are or previously were an outdoor cat that prefers grass or soil.



If your cat likes soft surfaces, try using a high quality, scoopable litter and put a soft rug under the box. If your cat likes slick, smooth surfaces, try putting in a thin layer of litter at one end of the box, leaving the other one bare and leave the box on a hard floor. If your cat has a history of being outdoors, add some soil to the litter. Make the area where they have been soiling aversive by covering it with an upside down carpet runner, aluminum foil, or citrus-scented cotton balls.

Location Preferences

Your cat may have location preferences if: they always eliminate in quiet, protected places, such as in a closet or under a desk; they always eliminate in the area where the litterbox previously was or where there are urine odors; or they eliminate on a different level of the house where the litterbox is.

Put at least one litterbox on every level of your house, and make the area where they are soiling aversive by covering it with an upside down carpet runner, aluminum foil, or citrus-scented cotton balls. OR Put a litterbox where your cat has been soiling. When they are consistently using it for at least a month, you can gradually move it to a more convenient spot at a rate of an inch per day.

What Not to Do

Don't ever punish your cat for going outside the litterbox. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to try and change the behavior. Any type of punishment will only make your cat afraid of you and they won't understand what you are trying to tell them. Just clean it thoroughly to eliminate any odor so your cat isn't motivated to go there again.