

Free-Roaming Owned Cats

Position:

The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) does not support the practice of allowing owned cats to roam outdoors unsupervised. EHS recommends that owned, domestic cats be kept indoors and only allowed outdoors in a fully enclosed area, or under supervision using a secure harness and leash or tie-out.

Summary

- Unsupervised and unrestricted outdoor access poses risks to cats and other animals, including wildlife such as birds.
- Cats as indoor pets are more likely to have a longer lifespan.
- It is possible to provide outlets for cats to express normal behaviours to maintain their welfare while living indoors.
- Free-roaming cats can contribute to increasing the population of community cats.
- Risks to the cat, other animals, and humans must be controlled by guardians if cats are to spend time outdoors.

Rationale

- Research shows that indoor cats live longer and tend to be healthier than outdoor cats.
- Cats can be dangerous to wildlife. It is estimated that between 100 and 350 million birds in Canada are killed by cats per year.
- Free-roaming cats face a variety of dangers outdoors, many of which can lead to painful injuries, illness or even death. Cats who are declawed are especially vulnerable since they are unable to climb or defend themselves.
 - DISEASE: Unvaccinated cats are at high risk of contracting or spreading diseases.
 - PARASITES: Cats can act as hosts for parasites such as fleas, ticks, worms, and/or ear mites.
 - POISONING: Cats may encounter antifreeze, yard chemicals, contaminated garbage, or poisoned animals. People intentionally leaving out poisoned food for cats has also been reported.
 - HARM FROM THE ELEMENTS: Cats may be affected by extremes in temperature or weather conditions, especially if they are unable to take shelter or find their way home.

- OTHER ANIMALS: Cats may be at risk of injury or infection from predators or conflicts with other cats. When such conflicts occur with a cat on another person's property, they can lead to undesirable behaviors in the resident cat, potentially straining their relationship with their guardian. To prevent future conflicts with free-roaming cats, guardians may also need to restrict their own cat's access to certain areas of the home.
 - HUMAN DANGERS: Some people view free-roaming cats as a nuisance and may deal with them inhumanely or relocate the cat, putting them at risk for injury or illness and making it less likely that the cat will be able to find their way back home.
 - TRAFFIC: Cats are not always adept at avoiding moving vehicles and vice versa.
 - DISORIENTATION: Cats can become disoriented when outside, leaving them unable to find their way home.
- Free-roaming cats may be collected by animal control or kept by homes they visit. The likelihood of a cat being returned to their guardian following admission to an animal shelter when found as a stray is low. Pet identification increases chances of return, but relies on finders detecting it, ID information being accurate, and guardians responding to being contacted in time.
 - Allowing intact cats to roam can lead to reproduction, and an exponential increase in the cat population.
 - Undesirable behaviours are not guaranteed to be remedied or fully addressed by letting cats outdoors. Providing outlets for natural behaviours or veterinary attention are recommended to address undesirable behaviours.
 - Letting owned cats outdoors is not a guarantee of exercise or a replacement for an appropriate diet and exercise which can be provided indoors.
 - Owned cats can live enriched lives indoors: an appropriate environment, enrichment, play, leashed walks, and outdoor enclosures such as enclosed balconies and catios can be used to provide mental and physical stimulation.
 - Free-roaming cats may be viewed as a nuisance to people in the community and other cats. Municipal bylaws may permit citizen complaints to be filed and penalize owners for allowing owned cats to stray via fines and reclaim fees. Keeping cats indoors prevents conflict with neighbors and repeated fines.
 - Fewer roaming animals reduces the strain on local animal control, animal shelters, and animal adoption agencies.
 - Direct supervision and control of owned cats helps protect the welfare of cats and other animals when outdoors. If going outdoors, guardians should ensure cats are

vaccinated, microchipped, spayed/neutered, and properly supervised to safeguard their wellbeing.

- EHS supports humane policies and practices which encourage the keeping of owned cats indoors.
- EHS encourages veterinarians, animal welfare organizations, and other stakeholders to continually provide education to cat guardians about the risks associated with letting cats roam freely.

References

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