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## **FELINE HOUSE SOILING: WHEN GOOD CATS DO BAD THINGS**

Despite the cat's reputation for fastidious cleanliness, house-soiling is the number one behavior problem of our feline friends.

Urinating in odd places can mean either a behavior problem or a medical problem and sometimes the difference is not clear cut. Cats often urinate in unusual places to get their owner's attention when they are feeling unwell. Further, cats often urinate in unusual places in an effort to reassert their claim to territory, this often arising from psychological stress which can easily lead to a disease state. Some cats have purely behavioral motivations without illness. Your veterinarian should evaluate your cat before you conclude that the problem is "behavioral" and you embark on a long term behavioral approach.

**IMPORTANT—Neutering is the first step in addressing this problem; Hormonal Motivations to mark territory are potent and must be removed.**

### **URINE MARKING/TERRITORIAL ANXIETY**

Cats use urination and defecation as a means of communication with other cats. By leaving their "mark," they are telling other cats "I was here on this date and this time." Other cats may then know this land has been claimed (or has not been recently claimed) and may act accordingly. Psychological stress such as the presence of other cats, prolonged absence of the owner (who is usually viewed as a parent by the pet cat), or other problems may create a need for a cat to reassert a territorial claim. Signs that this kind of stress is causing the problem might include some or all of the following:

Spraying urine on a vertical surface.

Urinating in the litter box sometimes and sometimes urinating elsewhere (as opposed to never using the box at all).

Defecating in the cat box but urinating outside the box.

The cat (either male or female) is not neutered.

There has been a change at home leading the cat to feel he/she must reassert his/her territorial boundaries (Examples: a new pet has been added, a new roommate has been added, a recent move to a new home, remodeling, the owner recently returned from vacation, other neighborhood cats are visible or smell-able in the yard).

The area marked is near a door or window.

The problem did not start until new furniture was added or the furniture was rearranged.

The cat appears to be responding to a punishment for another behavior.

The area marked involves the owner's bed or laundry.

The area marked is the same each time.

If any of these scenarios seem to fit, anti-anxiety medications may be tremendously helpful if this source of stress cannot be identified or cannot be altered.