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THE FELINE BEHAVIOR SERIES

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Preventing Spraying

Urine spraying

The application of urine to mark territory is different from the release of urine to eliminate waste from the body. Urine marking is called spraying, and the strategies for addressing it are different from those that you use in getting a cat to use a litter box.

The cat that's marking territory backs up to the object he wants to mark and sprays urine backward, with his tail held high and quivering, alternating his weight on his back feet.

Although both male and female cats spray, un-neutered males are the biggest offenders, followed by un-spayed females in season. The first rule of dealing with this stinky problem is to make sure that your pet is neutered - this procedure takes care of the problem in 90 percent of the cases if done before sexual maturity is attained, at about six months.

For those cats that don't respond to neutering, environmental stresses - such as a new person in the house or a neighbor's cat in the yard - may be triggering the spraying. Anti-anxiety drugs may help, as can cleaning sprayed areas thoroughly and covering them with foil to discourage fresh marking. (Cats dislike anything involving foil, and the sound of urine hitting the stuff really annoys them.) Don't hit your cat for spraying, even if you catch him in the act - doing so makes him even more insecure and likely to mark.

A few days of isolation in a "safe room" may break the spraying routine. (See the section "Calm kitty," earlier in this chapter, and also the use of safe rooms as discussed in the "Introductions" section of Chapter 5.)

Maybe your cat is trying to tell you something with his spraying. In her entertaining book *Hiss and Tell: True Stories From the Files of a Cat Shrink* (Crossing Press), behaviorist Pam Johnson writes about a man whose cat sprayed his new wife's work clothes every evening. In the end, he discovered that the woman was having an affair with a coworker, and the cat was reacting to the smell of the other man on the wife's clothing. Pretty smart!

*You can get your own copy of *Cats for Dummies* right here at VeterinaryPartner.com! Just email Tamara@vin.com.*

