

Preventing Litterbox Problems
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A cat that is urinating or defecating outside its litterbox creates serious problems for both the owner and the cat. Damage from litterbox problems can cost owners thousands of dollars in ruined carpets, rugs and furniture. Understandably, owners often become frustrated and angry and sometimes the cat ends up losing its home or its life. As with any serious problem, litterbox problems are easier to prevent than to resolve.

What can the average owner do to prevent litterbox problems? The key is to provide litterboxes that meet the behavioral needs of the cat. Cats are born with a natural predisposition to eliminate in soft, sandy material. However, individual cats may develop preferences for eliminating in a variety of materials including rocks or even on bare concrete! They don't like litter that is too dirty, too dusty or that is strongly scented with artificial scents. If owners pay attention to the behavior of their cats around the litterbox they can often identify the preferences of their cats and work to meet them.

Watch as your cat goes to the litter box and how she acts before and after eliminating. Cats that have no problem with their litterboxes will go the box in a relaxed, calm way and will scratch in the litter before and after they eliminate. A cat that isn't comfortable with the litterbox, its location, or the litter material may walk or run nervously to and from the box, may not scratch in the litter or may scratch at the box or outside the box. These may be early signs of a developing problem that needs attention.

The best way to find out what the cat prefers is to give her a choice. Set up a second litterbox with another kind of litter and see which one the cat uses over several days. Second, set up another box in a different location and see which one gets used most. Cats often dislike boxes placed near noisy appliances such as washers, dryers or furnaces or boxes placed in damp or cold locations. Consider placing litterboxes in easily accessible places. Make it as easy as possible for the cat to find a litterbox. If you have a multi-story residence or a large residence, you may need to place litterboxes on more than one level or at different places in the house.

If you have more than one cat in your home, be sure that you have at least one litterbox per cat so that the cats have opportunities to find relatively clean boxes at any time. Speaking of cleanliness, be sure that all litterboxes are cleaned regularly. Boxes with clumping litter should be scooped out at least once a day. Those with conventional clay litter should be cleaned at least twice a week, more often if necessary. Paying attention to your cat's litterbox habits may help you to avoid a serious problem.