



Recommendations for Addressing Flea Infestations and Fecal Accumulation Related to Free-Roaming Cats



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL

The presence of free-roaming cats can occasionally result in flea infestations and fecal accumulation in the areas where the cats congregate. The following recommendations are presented to assist property owners, land managers, and other responsible parties in addressing these issues.

Addressing Flea Infestations

Fleas are important public health pests and all efforts should be made to prevent pets and yards from becoming infested. The cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felis* (Bouche), is the most common flea infesting dogs, cats, and opossums in Los Angeles County. Besides being the intermediate host of the common tapeworm of dogs and cats, it will also readily feed on the blood of humans, producing irritation and allergic dermatitis. Most significantly it can transmit the organism that causes flea-borne typhus.

In almost all instances, successful flea control includes not only the treatment of infested pets, but also the thorough treatment of all areas where flea breeding is occurring. Any areas where the pet spends a considerable amount of time will produce “hot spots” of infestation that require special attention. For additional information on the biology and behavior of fleas please refer to our bulletin *Controlling Fleas of Dogs and Cats*.

When pets become infested with fleas, various treatments such as flea-dips, sprays and other applications, and feed-through control in the form of an additive to their food can be effective in eliminating and preventing infestations. It can be difficult to effectively manage flea infestations that result from the continued presence of free-roaming cats because it may be difficult or impossible to include the cats as part of the control program. Under such conditions, all attempts should be made to routinely treat the areas where the cats spend the greatest portion of their time.

Removal and Cleanup of Accumulated Fecal Material

Cat feces may be infected with roundworms or an organism that causes the disease known as toxoplasmosis. Cats become infected by eating infected hosts such as rodents and birds, or directly by exposure to the feces of infected cats. The parasites can then be passed in the cats' feces. Appropriate disposal of fecal material is important. Once an environment is contaminated with either of these organisms, it can remain infective for long periods of time under the right conditions.

It is important to take precautions when removing cat feces from the yard. Wear gloves during cleanup or when gardening and during any contact with soil or sand because it might be contaminated with cat feces that contain the infective organisms. Also, keep outdoor sandboxes covered.

Do not flush cat feces or permit feces to be washed into roadside gutters/storm drains by hosing down driveways or yards. The Monterey Bay Aquarium and others in California have expressed concern about the organism that causes toxoplasmosis. These concerns lead to an amendment to the California Fish and Game Code that declares several types of pollution caused by urban runoff are harmful to sea otters. Scientific studies point to links between cat feces, the pathogen that causes toxoplasmosis, and sea otter mortality. All efforts should be made to prevent contamination of ocean waters by protecting the water quality in the sea otters' natural habitat. Always dispose of fecal material by placing it in an eco-friendly bag, tying it tightly, and putting it in the garbage can where it can be safely contained within a landfill.

Recommendations to Discourage Free-Roaming Cats

You have the right to enjoy your yard and to protect your health and that of your pets. However, it is your responsibility to use only humane methods to solve the problem. The following are recommendations that may discourage free-roaming cats from entering your yard.

Determine why the cats may be attracted to your yard and eliminate those conditions. Bird feeders not only attract birds, but cats as well. Make sure trash cans are securely covered and quickly remove any food your outdoor pets do not immediately consume.

Observe the areas where the cats congregate and take simple steps to discourage the use of those areas. Trim beneath vegetation, repair/replace ventilation vents to prevent cats from hiding in crawl spaces beneath structures, and keep doors to out buildings secure.

Check with pet supply stores, garden centers, or the internet for commercial cat repellents. Other suggestions include attaching a rigid thin wire to the top of a fence or barrier wall where cats enter the yard, or plant herbs such as coleus or blue rue that have odors that are reported to repel cats.

For areas where cats want to dig, ornamental pebbles may be an effective deterrent. Avoid those that are very round or smooth, as they make a great cat bed. Small-gauge chicken wire can also be buried under a light layer of dirt or mulch to prevent digging. Landscape sprinklers set on a staggered schedule may also act as a deterrent.

For more information, please visit the websites of the
Department of Public Health and the Department of Animal Care and Control:

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>

<http://animalcare.lacounty.gov>