

Urine Marking in Cats

When cats mark their territory, typically they are in a standing position, their tail is high and twitches, their whole body may twitch, and they back up towards a vertical surface and spray a pungent smelling urine. Urine marking, called “spraying,” is not considered a litter box problem. Sometimes cats deposit small amounts of urine outside of the litter box from a squatting position. Depending on the circumstances, this may also be a form of urine marking. Urinating large amounts of urine from a squatting position, or defecating, outside of the litter box are typically considered litter box problems. For more information on how to correct litter box problems, please see our article titled “Litter Box Problems.”

Urine marking is a form of communication. Cats may urine mark for the following reasons: 1) to let other cats know they are present (i.e. to avoid conflict with other cats), 2) to advertise their reproductive status (i.e. to find a mate), and 3) when they are distressed (i.e. resulting from conflicts with other cats in the home or cats seen around the perimeter of the home, from conflicts with other pets in the home, or from a change in routine, such as the addition of a baby to the household or moving to a new home).

The following recommendations will help resolve urine marking problems.

1. Rule out any medical problem. Although urine marking is not typically associated with an underlying medical problem, anxiety caused by a medical condition may contribute to marking.
2. Neuter or spay your cat. If your cat is marking to advertise his or her reproductive status, neutering or spaying has been proven to reduce urine marking.
3. If there is a conflict between your cat and an outdoor cat:
 - a. Block your cat’s visual access to the outdoor cat by closing blinds or doors.
 - b. Prevent the outdoor cat from visiting your property by setting up a motion-detector device. Some attach to hoses or sprinklers, others emit ultrasonic sounds.
4. If there is a conflict between your cat and another indoor cat:
 - a. Check to make sure there are enough litter boxes for each cat, plus one extra, in case the conflict is over litter box use. Provide extra boxes in locations where the marking cat spends much of her time. Clean litter boxes with warm, unscented soapy water on a weekly basis. This will help to eliminate the scent of the stress-inducing the cat.
 - b. Provide a variety of perching areas for all of the cats, such as cat towers, window perches, and cat beds on window sills.
 - c. Distribute food, water, toys, scratching pads and posts throughout your household.
 - d. Play with your cats using toys on strings, or any toy your cats prefers.
5. If there is a conflict between your cat and another pet in the house, such as your dog:
 - a. Provide the cat with extra litter boxes in locations where she spends much of her time, restricting your dog’s access to those locations.
 - b. Provide a variety of perching areas in locations your dog cannot access.
 - c. Place your cat’s food, water, and toys in locations your dog cannot access.
6. If you are unsure of which cat is marking in your multi-cat household, speak with your veterinarian about fluorescein. Fluorescein is a harmless dye given to one cat at a time. The

dye causes the urine to fluoresce blue under ultraviolet light and will help determine which cat is marking.

7. Clean all soiled areas with an enzymatic cleanser (available in pet stores or online). Do not use ammonia to clean soiled areas as the scent may attract cats back to the area to mark again.
8. Consult your veterinarian regarding medication for your cat. Very often urine marking is caused by stress or anxiety. Medication can help alleviate that stress or anxiety.
9. Lastly, **never** rub your cat's nose in her urine or throw something at her to stop her if she is in the act of marking. This will only serve to increase her anxiety and cause more urine marking!

Barbara Pezzanite, Ph.D., CPDT-KA
Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist