

Feral Cats Don't Belong in Shelters

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FERAL CATS ARE KILLED IN SHELTERS because they do not fit into a shelter's objectives. Shelters strive to find homes for adoptable animals—that is, companion animals that are lost, abandoned, or stray, and that can be put up for adoption. Feral cats are not stray cats. They are wild and are never candidates for adoption. Whether it is immediately or after a holding period, feral cats are killed in shelters.

What does this accomplish?

It has no effect on reducing the number of feral cats in the community. Other cats move in; survivors reproduce quickly. If anything, their numbers grow. Stopping reproduction is the only way to reduce feral cat numbers.

It does not lessen complaints about cats or stop nuisance behaviors. Sterilizing the cats does both.

It does not protect public health. Studies show that the health of feral cats is on a par with owned cats. Vaccinating, sterilizing, and returning healthy feral cats to managed colonies is the best way to protect the public from wildlife diseases.

It does nothing to improve the overall welfare of cats. Cats outdoors are a fact of life. As many as one in five U.S. households feeds outdoor cats. We can reduce cat

numbers and improve their welfare—and our own—through spay/neuter and humane management.

It adds to the stress, the work, and the potential liability that shelters and shelter personnel deal with daily.

There is a simple solution.

Every shelter can reduce the stress of euthanasia-related work on shelter personnel, lower its euthanasia rate, and help bring cat numbers down by stopping the intake of feral cats and offering the public help with Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and low-cost spay/neuter services.

Experience has shown that communities adjust to and then embrace this policy change. Calls about cats are now routinely categorized as "complaints," but records show that most people call to ask for help with nuisance behaviors or to get the cats sterilized. They do not want to have the cats killed. And true complaints drop off sharply when the cats have been sterilized and vaccinated.

Euthanasia is the leading cause of death among cats and dogs in the United States. Working together, we can conquer one aspect of it. We can stop killing healthy feral cats. ■

Alley Cat Allies is the foremost expert on feral cats. We want to help every shelter and animal control agency to make this transition. For information and assistance, go to www.alleycat.org, e-mail alleycat@alleycat.org; or call 240-482-1980, ext 330.



Alley Cat Allies *The National Feral Cat Resource*

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